



COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER

at West Point



Held Hostage:

Analyses of Kidnapping Across Time and Among Jihadist Organizations



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The United States Military Academy



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During the course of this research, the authors of this report strove to appreciate the trauma borne by hostages and their families. The authors' thoughts go out to those whose lives have been drastically impacted by these events and those who have lost loved ones. It has been our intent, within the pages of this report and the accompanying database, to treat former hostages and their families with the respect they are due. We hope that we have realized this intention.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide policymakers, practitioners, and academics with data and analysis regarding kidnapping events perpetrated by jihadist groups against Westerners in non-Western countries.¹ It will do so by first examining all non-state actor kidnappings from both a macro- and micro-level to place the phenomenon in context. This general approach then becomes the springboard from which to compare and contrast trends in jihadist kidnappings with those of other non-state actors. Following a brief introduction that outlines the scope, data, and methods used in the study, the first section's macro-level analysis uses data from the Global Terrorism Database (GDT) maintained by the University of Maryland's START Consortium (7,048 incidents between 1970 and 2013). The second section's micro-level analysis of kidnapping events involving Western hostages since 2001 utilizes an original Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) dataset consisting of 1,485 observations that incorporated data from individual academics, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), non-profit and for-profit research think tanks, and private sector insurance companies. Key findings in both data collection processes are found below:

Kidnapping in Historical Perspective (1970–2013)

- » There has been a worldwide spike in kidnapping events since 2003. The trend is global and not confined to one specific region.
- » The overwhelming majority of kidnappings are domestic (intra-state); kidnappings of Westerners are rare in comparison to the universe of kidnappings.

Kidnapping of Westerners (2001–2015)

Overall Trends

- » Although total non-state actor kidnapping incidents and victims peaked in 2008 due to Somali piracy, the number of incidents and victims have trended upward from 2010 to 2014.
- » Jihadist groups are primarily responsible for these increases.
- » The Middle East, followed by Africa, accounts for the most total kidnappings and the most Sunni jihadist kidnappings, however, most abductions in Africa are conducted by non-jihadist actors.

Trends in Nationality of Victims

- » Six countries (Turkey, United States, Italy, United Kingdom, France, and Germany) account for more than 60% of total, jihadist, and other non-state actor kidnappings.
- » Trends in Sunni jihadist kidnapping rates from 2010–2014 for these countries generally mirror the overall increase in Sunni jihadist abductions, casting some doubt on the ability or desire of Sunni jihadist groups to target by nationality.

Trends in Occupation

- » After the removal of outliers, most (53%) jihadist kidnappings are confined to either NGOs or journalists (NGOs, 34.5%; journalists, 18%).
- » Journalists are more likely to be kidnapped in open conflict zones (AFPAK, Iraq, Syria). NGOs are abducted almost equally between conflict and non-conflict zones.

¹ For more distinction, see the definitions at the beginning of Data and Methods.

Jihadist Dynamics

- » Thirty-six jihadist groups have kidnapped Westerners. Almost 70% of abductions have been attributed to the Islamic State/al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI),² the Taliban, and al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

Duration Findings

- » Jihadist groups hold hostages longer than any other group type. Most Western hostages are kept between three to six months, with only 9% being held for more than a year.
- » Al-Shabaab, Islamic State/AQI, and the Taliban have the greatest tendency to resolve Western abductions within the first month (whether by execution, release, or some other outcome).

Outcome Findings

- » Sunni jihadist execution rates (15%) are three times that of all other non-state actors combined (5%). The execution rate for Americans held hostage by these groups is 47%; nearly four times the rate (12%) for other Western hostages.
- » Turkey (85%), Italy (81%), France (69%), and Germany (50%) have the highest release rates among the top six Western countries targeted for kidnappings (UK rate is 24% and U.S. is 16%); media reporting indicates these countries have, at times, paid ransoms or conducted prisoner exchanges.
- » Islamic State/AQI (45%) and al-Shabaab (25%), top the list of jihadist groups with the highest execution percentage of Western hostages; Boko Haram and Jabhat al-Nusra have not executed a Western hostage to date.

Outcome/Duration Findings

- » Most executions of Western hostages by jihadist groups occurred within the first 30 days of captivity (73%); 5% of captives that survived the first 30 days were executed between one and 12 months after abduction; and 17% of captives that survived a year in captivity (and more) were executed.
- » Most (known) successful rescue operations occurred during months two and six of captivity under Sunni jihadists (65%), of those 58% happen during months two and three; When Sunni jihadist groups have released Westerners, 85% of these releases occurred within the first six months of captivity.

Key Implications

- » While nationality appears to be important in determining the fate of individuals once kidnapped, it does not appear to influence who gets kidnapping.
- » Although kidnappings are often thought of as preplanned events against specific individuals, they often seem to occur opportunistically against individuals who are in the wrong place at the wrong time.

2 When designated Islamic State/AQI, these numbers include all kidnappings perpetrated by the Islamic State and its precursor organizations; Tahwid wal Jihad, AQI, the Mujahedeen Shura Council (MSC), the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham / the Levant (ISIS/ISIL).

Introduction

In March 2013, David Haines and Frederico Motka were kidnapped while traveling together near the Turkish border in Syria.¹ The men were both foreigners and aid workers, they were held in the same prison by the same militant group, and yet they suffered sharply different fates. In May 2014, Motka was released, while four months later, Haines became the fourth Westerner to be beheaded by the Islamic State. Press accounts noted that the major difference between the men was their nationality: Motka was Italian, while Haines was British.²

In the summer of 2014, the Islamic State began its campaign of public executions of kidnapped Westerners. Though these barbaric acts captured the world's attention, hostage taking is not new.³ Nevertheless, research designed to increase our understanding of this threat is limited. As in the story above, most discussions regarding kidnappings rely on anecdotal evidence. A more detailed analysis of key questions regarding the role of group type, nationality of the victim, and outcome as they related to kidnapping incidents has been lacking for want of publicly available data.

In an effort to address this, the CTC is proud to release this report, which examines trends related to the kidnapping of Westerners by jihadist groups. The report relies on a newly gathered open-source dataset of the kidnapping of Westerners from 2001–2015, which the CTC will publicly release together with this report. We believe that the report and accompanying data will be an important resource for policymakers, practitioners, and academics interested in this area.

In this paper we first describe the data and method used to support the analysis in this report. We then turn to an examination of global trends in hostage-taking incidents over the past four decades (Section 1). To conduct this analysis, we utilize the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), which is hosted at the University of Maryland and funded in part by the Department of Homeland Security. After this macro-level analysis, the report then undertakes a more detailed examination of the kidnapping of Westerners, with specific emphasis on abductions perpetrated by jihadist groups (Section 2).

Data and Methods

The two main empirical sections of this report rely on different data sources, but they employ complementary methodological approaches. A short review of the data used for each section and the associated limitations related to each section follows, but first a note on definitions.

According to the United Nations, a hostage is defined as “a person detained and under the threat of death, injury, or continued detention by an individual or group in order to compel a third party to do (or abstain from doing) any act as an explicit or implicit condition of the person's release.”⁴ This report will use this as the basis of the definition of a hostage, recognizing that at least some jihadist hostages appear to have been detained strictly for the purposes of propaganda and that compelling a third party through direct means of negotiations is not always the goal of terrorist actors.

Hostage events are generally considered to fall into one of two broad categories: (1) kidnapping and (2) hostage barricade situations (hereafter barricade). The distinguishing characteristic between them

1 Lizzie Dearden, “David Haines Isis kidnapping: British hostage's aid agency calls for his release after ‘intolerable’ threat to behead father-of-two,” *Independent*, 6 September 2014.

2 Rukmini Callimachi, “The Horror Before the Beheadings,” *New York Times*, 25 October 2014.

3 For instance, more than a dozen Westerners were kidnapped in Lebanon between 1982 and 1992, resulting in the deaths of at least five of the victims. See Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* (St. Martins Press, New York: 2004), p. 37.

4 Language borrowed from Article 1 of the International Convention Against the Taking of Hostages (United Nations, 1979).

is whether the location of the hostages is known.⁵ In barricade situations, the locations of the hostages and captors are known and, often, public. Hijackings (both aerial and non-aerial) are often included in this type of hostage event.⁶

Kidnappings, on the other hand, are normally hostage events where captives are abducted and taken to an unknown location and held while the captors typically engage in negotiations to make their demands known.⁷ For this study, we will generally accept this definition of kidnapping,⁸ with the understanding that advances in state technology and intelligence gathering may allow for the identification of the kidnapped hostage's location and that the *intent* of the group to abduct and hide the hostage is the determinative factor. An incident in which a hostage is abducted and held in a safe house in Syria, whether that location is known by Western governments or not, is considered a kidnapping rather than a barricade incident. The inaccessibility of the hostage's location, even if known, prevents the types of response and dynamics typical of barricade incidents such as the 2004 Beslan or 2013 In Amenas attacks.

This study will focus entirely on kidnapping incidents, excluding barricade incidents due to differences in the dynamics between the two types of hostage events.⁹

Section 1: Kidnapping in Historical Perspective (1970–2013)

Section 1 relies exclusively on the GTD to provide a high-level review of the trends associated with the kidnapping by terrorist actors from 1970–2013. Data from the GTD is specifically used to evaluate temporal, geographic, and motivational shifts in kidnapping by terrorists.

While the GTD is largely recognized as being the most complete publicly available dataset on terrorism incidents it is not comprehensive and has a number of limitations. One limitation is that ownership of the GTD has changed over time, resulting in some shifts in coding schemes, teams, and methods. The GTD was originally developed by the Pinkerton Agency for use in law enforcement and subsequently was taken over by a team of coders from the University of Maryland. This has resulted in some academics criticizing the GTD for its “inconsistent collection of data” over time.¹⁰ Another criticism is the lack of detail regarding individual incidents in the GTD. While the GTD contains a range of variables, many are missing information or otherwise incomplete. Thus, while the GTD is very useful for trend analysis, caution must be exercised in cases where details are of critical importance. Finally, the GTD is released annually, forcing studies that seek the most current information to turn elsewhere. While the GTD remains the most comprehensive dataset on terrorism events available to researchers, caution is required in its use, especially when the emphasis is on specifics rather than broader trends. This is why the present study relies on both the GTD and our own data collection effort.

As described above, this study focuses on kidnapping incidents as opposed to barricade incidents. In

5 Brian Jenkins, Janera Johnson, and David Ronfeldt “Numbered Lives: Some Statistical Observations from 77 International Hostage Episodes,” RAND Corporation, July 1977, p. 9; Jerome Corsi, “Terrorism as a Desperate Game: Fear, Bargaining, and Communication in the Terrorist Event,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 25:1, (March 1981), p. 51.

6 Khusrav Gaibulloev and Todd Sandler, “Hostage Taking: Determinants of Terrorist Logistical and Negotiation Success,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 46:6, (2009), p. 2.

7 Jenkins et al, p. 9.

8 For the purposes of this report, the terms kidnapping and abduction will be used interchangeably.

9 For example, although its examination of 77 “international hostage incidents” was potentially unrepresentative, Jenkins et al found kidnappings were (1) significantly longer than barricade incidents and (2) more likely to end with the hostage takers demands being met. Gaibulloev and Sandler found variation in dynamics between negotiations and outcomes between the two types of events.

10 For background on this debate see, Robert Pape, Keven Ruby, and Vincent Bauer, “Government Data Exaggerate the Increase in Terror Attacks,” Washington Post Blog, July, 21, 2014; see also Global Terrorism Database Senior Staff, “The Challenges of Collecting Terrorism Data,” Washington Post Blog, August 6, 2014.

the GTD, one can filter out incidents along similar lines.¹¹ Consequently, to maintain analytical focus and overall consistency in this report, we elected to filter out barricade events.

Section 2: Kidnapping of Westerners (2001-2015)

Because the GTD lacks the level of detail and comprehensiveness required to detect specific trends in jihadist kidnapping incidents, the CTC created a kidnapping database drawn from media reports, academic publications, and data from the private sector in an effort to gain additional fidelity on kidnappings. The database incorporates instances of Westerners kidnapped by non-state actors from four datasets: the GTD, Aid Worker Security Database,¹² the Risk Advisory Group's Terrorism Tracker Database,¹³ and the IntelCenter Database.¹⁴ Researchers also engaged with the Intelligence Community's Prisoner of War / Missing in Action (POW/MIA) Analytic Cell within the Defense Counterterrorism Center / Defense Intelligence Agency (DCTC/DIA), Risk Advisory Group, and Control Risks Group to obtain contextual information related to kidnappings and confirm findings arising from this report.¹⁵

Data Collection

Data collection followed a three-tiered approach. First, investigators conducted open-source research to support the merging of four different databases and to supplement their entries. This required that researchers consolidate the cases from each of the other datasets, merge overlapping entries, and conduct corroborating research to supplement the database with additional detail and correct elements when necessary.

Then, using this seed data, researchers found both new cases and further information for existing cases. Additionally, a literature review of academic publications related to kidnapping generated additional entries from both data-driven and anecdotal studies.

Lastly, the Intelligence Community's POW/MIA Analytic Cell in the DCTC/DIA provided an unclassified list of kidnapping-related reports cleared through the Open Source Center (OSC). Researchers used this list of more than 3,000 kidnapping-related media reports to conduct targeted open-source research to identify applicable cases.

The result of all of these efforts was that a total of 664 individuals were drawn from the four databases, with many cases being represented in only one of the other four datasets.¹⁶ CTC researchers supplemented this with another 821 unique individual entries not found in any of the other datasets. In total, the CTC database contains 1,485 individual entries of Western victims of kidnapping (across 657 incidents) from January 2001 to mid-July 2015. While it is unlikely that these efforts identified every Western citizen kidnapped by non-state actors, we are confident that our database represents a more complete, open-source resource of kidnapped Westerners than was previously available.

Description of Data: Scope and Coding

In terms of the scope of the data in the second section, the criteria for inclusion was that an individual

11 The GTD codebook can be found at <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/downloads/Codebook.pdf>. The definition for a hostage barricade incident is on page 23.

12 Humanitarian Outcomes (2015), Aid Worker Security Database. Available from <https://aidworkersecurity.org/>.

13 Risk Advisory Group (2015), Terrorism Tracker Database. Available from <https://www.terrorismtracker.com/index.php/>.

14 IntelCenter (2015), IntelCenter Database. Available from <http://intelcenter.com/icdlogin.html>.

15 No material deemed Classified by the U.S. government or Confidential by corporate partners was used to create the CTC Hostage Dataset.

16 Only 33% of the entries drawn from the four databases overlapped. Only two kidnapping events, (six individuals) were present in all four of the databases.

would be included if they were (1) Westerners¹⁷ kidnapped¹⁸ by (2) non-state actors¹⁹ (3) outside Western nations.²⁰ In addition, our focus in this study was on non-state actors with political motivations, leading to more attention being paid to terrorist and named militant groups. The focus on non-state actors with political motivations notwithstanding, for purposes of comparison we also collected data related to actors whose motivations were less overtly political, such as pirate and tribal groups (discussed below in Perpetrator Data).

The project focuses on Western citizens for three primary reasons. First, the kidnapping of Westerners, and our response to this type of incident is currently a major policy issue and one of significant relevance to U.S. national security priorities. The second reason has to do with the availability of data. In order to discern trends in jihadist kidnappings, this project relies on detailed collection of information about kidnapping cases. The level of reporting needed to support that collection is more likely when the incident involves the citizens of Western, specifically OECD, countries. Third, in order for an analysis of jihadist kidnappings to be valuable, a study would need to present an understanding of trends within a larger body of kidnappings for context. Gathering such information on all kidnappings around the world would significantly increase the time and resources required to complete the project. Limiting the collection to Westerners allowed researchers to collect more detailed information on jihadist kidnappings while still providing enough data to allow insights into larger trends in kidnapping.

For this study, data collection and analysis focused on three main aspects of a kidnapping event: victim, event, and perpetrator data. What follows is a discussion of the information collected in each segment and the categories used to code the database.

Victim Data

Victim data collection focused on identifying the nationality and occupation of the victim of the kidnapping event.

Nationality

In cases where victims had dual nationality, both nationalities were captured in the dataset, however analysis was only conducted on one nationality.²¹ The dataset only includes cases in which researchers could identify the nationality of the victim. In cases where kidnapping victims were identified only as “foreigners,” the decision was made not to include those incidents in the dataset.²²

17 In this report, the term “Western” refers to the 34 member states of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The OECD states are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the United States. Available from: <http://www.oecd.org/about/membersandpartners/>.

18 Some evidence of kidnapping (proof of life, demands, first-person accounts of the abduction, or government sources) had to exist for a case to be considered abduction. Individuals who simply went missing or were found dead were not included in the dataset.

19 Detentions by states or state-sanctioned militias are not included in this study due to substantial differences in their motivations and methods. The only exception to this are kidnappings conducted by Hamas, which despite its role in participating in the governance of the Palestinian Territories, remains on the U.S. State Department’s list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations.

20 This dataset does not include OECD citizens kidnapped within OECD countries due to the fact that the majority of these cases would be domestic criminal cases. It would be difficult, due to significant underreporting, to obtain a representative sample of such cases. The noticeable non-state actors that this excludes are Mexican drug cartels and Kurdish militant groups operating in Turkey. This dataset did, however, include instances where OECD citizens were kidnapped within OECD countries if they were transported across international boundaries and held in non-OECD countries.

21 In the event that one of two nationalities was not an OECD nation, analysis was run on the OECD nationality component. An individual with Yemeni and U.S. citizenship, for instance, would be analyzed as a U.S. citizen. In cases when both nationality components were OECD nations (nine cases), analysis was run on the nationality deemed most applicable or most often used in new reporting.

22 The reason for not including these cases is that it was impossible to determine if the “foreigner” fit within our definition of a “Westerner.” It is important to note that cases with “foreign” victims were not dismissed without undergoing continued research to attempt to confirm the nationality of the victims.

Occupation

In addition to the victim's nationality, their occupation was also researched and coded. In coding occupations, researchers placed each individual in one of the following ten categories: Government, Military, NGO, Journalist, Corporate, Skilled Worker, Unskilled Worker, Sailor, Tourist/Student, or Family. A brief description of each of these categories follows.

The "Government" category indicates that the victim was a government employee in an official capacity at the time of the incident. This category included all agencies of a national or international governing body. This includes, but is not limited to, diplomatic services, intelligence services, official government agencies involved in relief work (e.g. the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)), and law enforcement agencies. The only government agencies not coded in this category were branches of a country's armed forces, which we placed in another category labeled "Military." Individuals who were not official government employees but were working on government contracts are not included in this category and are instead coded as "Skilled Worker" or "Unskilled Worker," depending on the nature of their employment.

The category "Military" consists of members of the armed services of a national government. This includes all branches of armed service, to include service members assigned to roles as peacekeepers or observers with international governing bodies. Consistent with our approach in the "Government" category, "Military" does not include individuals who were working on government contracts for ancillary services for the military. Instead, these individuals are coded as "Skilled Worker" or "Unskilled Worker," depending on the nature of their employment.

To be clear, this category includes uniformed members of an armed service captured by non-state actors while conducting military operations overseas. Some analysts consider such individuals as "prisoners of war" instead of "hostages." Broadly speaking, this classification can have significant ramifications on a state's decision to intercede in the case as well as the public response to such a decision.²³ More broadly, it is important to clarify that the inclusion of these cases in the data does not imply any stance on how such cases should be classified by policymakers; their inclusion is only intended to broaden the understanding of the dynamics associated with kidnapping by non-state actors.

Victims who were not employed by private companies or governments and were kidnapped while performing some kind of aid work were coded as "NGO." This includes, but is not limited to employees of relief organizations, missionaries, teachers, doctors, and private citizens conducting relief work.

A victim's occupation was coded "Journalist" if they were researching or reporting for a newspaper, magazine, television, or radio broadcast company. Filmmakers and members of film and television crews were also included in this category.

If a victim was employed by a private company that was not a media organization they were coded in one of four categories (Corporate, Skilled Worker, Unskilled Worker, or Sailor), depending on the type of work they performed at the time of the incident. An individual who was an executive or owner of a business, as well those described as a "businessman" or "businesswoman," was coded as "Corporate." The category "Skilled Worker" was used to indicate someone hired by a company to perform a task that requires technical knowledge and experience. This category includes engineers, oil workers, surveyors, mining experts, heavy equipment operators, as well as staffers and security contractors. The "Unskilled Worker" category is used to identify individuals hired to perform work requiring less technical skill. This category includes drivers, construction workers, and manual labor.²⁴ An individual hired to serve aboard a commercial seagoing vessel was coded as "Sailor." This category includes all

23 Michael Crowley, "Bowe Bergdahl: Terrorist Hostage or POW?" *Time*, 4 June 2014.

24 Our goal in dividing skilled and unskilled labor was to illustrate differences (if any) that exist in the kidnapping of different types of workers. Admittedly, it is a subjective distinction that we use and is not intended to be a value-judgment on the legitimacy of kidnapping any of these individuals.

levels of corporate maritime service, to include captains and engineers. It does not, however, include private citizens kidnapped while sailing, these individuals have coded as “Tourist/Student.”

The occupation category “Tourist/Student” identifies individuals who have been abducted while visiting a country temporarily in a non-work or relief related capacity. This category includes tourists, individuals visiting family members, and students studying abroad.

The final occupation category, “Family,” denotes individuals abducted while accompanying a family member present in the country in a work-related capacity. This category assumes the individuals coded as “Family” were living or traveling with their family member, rather than visiting temporarily. Individuals abducted visiting family members in a country temporarily are coded as “Tourist/Student.”²⁵

Kidnapping Incident Data

The second segment of data collection focused on the facts surrounding the abduction and resolution of the event. This collection consisted of the beginning and end dates of the captivity, the outcomes of the event (i.e., execution, release, etc.), the country where the kidnapping occurred, and the country in which the hostage was held.

Dates

Abduction and outcome dates were collected on each kidnapping instance, where available. When exact dates of abductions were unavailable, dates of news reports were used to narrow down the date range.²⁶ When articles were only specific to the month, the 15th of the month was entered. While outcome dates were coded in the same manner, this issue was not as straightforward in cases where the resolution was that the group executed the victim. It is often the case that the execution is announced by the group via some form of messaging, but the exact date that the execution took place is not mentioned. In these cases, execution dates are coded as the date a video or message was released or a body was found, except in cases where bodies were discovered well after execution.²⁷ While this type of coding is not as accurate as we would like, it does allow researchers to conduct some analysis on the duration of captivities and represents the best informed guess of the researchers based upon available open-source evidence.

Outcomes

Outcomes of kidnapping events were broken down into eight categories: Still Captive, Released, Rescued, Escaped, Executed, Died in Captivity, Died During Rescue, and Unknown.

A victim was classified as “Still Captive” if some proof of life, either a video or an eye-witness account, placed them as alive in captivity between July 2014 and July 2015. If proof of life has not been offered within that period, the outcome was classified as “Unknown,” irrespective of a government’s position regarding the case.²⁸ Cases less than a year old are also coded as “Unknown” if no proof of life has been provided. To be very clear, this does not represent an assessment regarding whether or not a hostage

25 In December 2008, a German couple was kidnapped in Yemen while visiting their daughter, who was a U.N. employee working in the country. See “Yemeni tribe kidnaps three Germans,” *Al Arabiya News*, 15 December 2008. The couple was coded “Tourist/Student” as they were visiting the region rather than living with their daughter permanently.

26 For instance, if a news report said “earlier this week” and no other reporting was found, an estimated date was entered, based on the report date.

27 For instance, five UK citizens (Alan McMenemy, Jason Swindlehurst, Jason Creswell, Alec MacLachlan, and Peter Moore) were kidnapped in Iraq in 2007 by Asaib Ahl al-Haq. Moore was released two years later, but the other four were killed. Three bodies (Swindlehurst, Creswell, MacLachlan) were returned to the United Kingdom in 2009, one (McMenemy) in 2012. While these entries are coded as executed, because of the ambiguity no date was coded for their execution.

28 U.S. citizen Caitlan Coleman and Canadian citizen Joshua Boyle have, for instance, been coded “Unknown” due to the lack of a public proof of life since August 2013, despite news reports which indicate that their respective governments continue to work on their behalf.

remained in captivity at the time of this writing, but is a temporal cut-off point used for purposes of the analysis.

A victim was classified as “Released” if they were freed from captivity by the group holding them. This category includes cases in which groups freed victims for humanitarian reasons, in return for ransoms or other concessions (such as prisoner exchanges), or as the result of mediation by third parties.

Victims freed from their captivity despite a group’s intent to continue to hold them were classified as “Rescued.” This category includes rescues by military and police forces, as well as cases where a victim was rescued by another non-state actor. It is important to understand that not all rescues are deliberate operations conducted by security forces and that some are chance encounters with groups holding hostages who were freed in the course of the operation.

Kidnappings that end when the victim breaks free from the confinement or control of the group who abducted them are classified as “Escaped.”

When a victim is killed by the group holding them, they have been classified as “Executed.” If the victim is killed, either by the group or potential rescuers, during the course of rescue, they have been coded as “Died During Rescue.” If a victim dies during the course of confinement for another reason (illness, malnutrition, militant infighting, accidental targeting), they have been coded as “Died in Captivity.”

If the fate of the kidnapping victim is undetermined, the outcome is coded as “Unknown.” This includes cases where no reporting is available or where available reporting is conflicting. As mentioned earlier, this category also includes cases where no proof of life has been provided in the past year to indicate that the victim is still alive, yet no reporting on their death is available.

Country

The final part of event data collected were the locations where individuals were kidnapped and held. The countries of kidnap were collected and coded according to geographical regions and sub-regions²⁹, as well as U.S. Combatant Command Area of Responsibility.³⁰ If victims were moved across international borders, the country they were held in was collected as well.³¹

Perpetrator Data

The third segment of data collection focused on the perpetrators of the kidnapping event and, if different, the group responsible for holding the victim. Further coding was done based on whether or not the group holding the victim was a jihadist organization or some other type of organization.

Group Name

There are two ways in which information would be entered in the “Group Name” field. First, researchers recorded a group name if there was an uncontested claim of responsibility for the kidnap and or detention of the victim. Second, in cases where either there was no claim or multiple claims, additional news sources were consulted to ascertain the responsible group. When a kidnapping was undertaken by a militia without a formal name, but which was largely known to be associated with a particular individual, that individual’s name was coded in the data set in the applicable field.

In a few instances (3% of cases) evidence was found that a group responsible for the abduction transferred the victim to a different organization for the duration of captivity and the outcome of the event.

29 Geographical regions and sub-regions were based on the United Nations Statistics Division definitions.

30 The U.S. Department of Defense assigns geographic responsibility for its regionally aligned Combatant Commands based on its Unified Command Plan. The latest published plan is Unified Command Plan 2011.

31 We found reporting of this in 61/1485 cases (4%). While we believe it is likely fairly rare, we also understand that concrete reporting on where individuals are held is very limited.

Group Type

Each group was coded according to one of five group types; Jihadists, Other Militant Groups, Tribal Groups, Pirates, and Unknown.

Groups coded as “Jihadist” were groups that have ascribed to jihadi ideology.³² With two exceptions,³³ groups coded in this group are named and have published material and videos allowing researchers to make this determination. Several groups examined, especially those operating in Iraq, seemed to have hallmarks of conduct associated with jihadi groups, but further research into the groups was unable to provide enough evidence to classify them as “Jihadist.” Those groups, when named, have been classified “Other Militant Group.”

Groups coded as “Other Militant Group” are groups with names or discernible leaders whose ideology and political behaviors can be identified as being dedicated to the use of armed force toward the achievement of a political objective.³⁴ However, what separates these groups from the “Jihadist” category is that they do not adhere to jihadi beliefs. And, while there is certainly variation within the groups that we classify as “Other Militant Groups,” given that the intent of this study was to see how jihadist groups differed from all other group types, these individual ideologies have been coded together.³⁵

Groups coded as “Tribal” are indigenous groups bound by kinship and geographic ties in a (typically) smaller region. While some militant groups are formed along tribal lines, our coding of a group type as “Tribal” was done when the group associated with the kidnapping displayed little evidence of having goals such as overthrowing governments and fighting against enemies outside of their smaller region/area. The groups coded as “Tribal” in the database have dynamics which generally differ from politically motivated groups organized along tribal lines, which have been coded “Other Militant Groups.”

Groups were coded “Pirate” if they conducted seaborne kidnappings of Westerners.³⁶ In the event a named group conducted a maritime kidnapping (i.e. Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) militants in Nigeria) the event was classified “Other Militant Groups.” Land-based kidnappings conducted by indefinable organized networks of maritime kidnappers were also coded as “Pirate.”

Groups were coded as “Unknown” if researchers could not find a discernible leader or group identity in regard to those responsible for the kidnapping. This category almost certainly contains groups that should be coded for other categories, as well as kidnappings conducted by criminal actors. However, without more information, it was impossible to have sufficient confidence to make such determinations. We include these incidents in the analysis that follows because they will provide some context of the dynamics of kidnapping cases when groups do not claim responsibility.³⁷

Data Limitations

While our dataset is large compared to other studies with a similar intent, there are several limitations in our approach. First, it is difficult to know how representative our collection efforts are overall. While we are confident that we have gathered more data than currently exists in the open-source realm, there is likely a significant underreporting of kidnapping incidents. This underreporting is due to

32 Nelly Lahoud, *The Jihadis' Path to Self-Destruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

33 In two instances, the group was not named, but news reporting indicated the group was a jihadist group operating in Syria and comprised of foreign fighters, leading researchers to classify the group as “Jihadist.”

34 Groups like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), despite having different ideological underpinnings are grouped together in this category.

35 The individual groups, however, are identified in the database.

36 The decision to include piracy cases is not without controversy. For more discussion on this, see Appendix A: The Inclusion of Pirates.

37 It is alleged that terrorist groups, in some cases, may specifically not claim responsibility publically to facilitate negotiation with Western governments.

several factors. Governments may fail to report or may actively suppress reporting of kidnappings to avoid appearing weak or unable to offer security. It is also impossible to know how many individuals fail to report their kidnappings in order to protect their privacy and safety, as captivity by non-state groups is often a harrowing and traumatic experience. Further, some organizations believe that “media blackouts” help facilitate hostage negotiations and secure the release of victims.³⁸ These actions only exacerbate the difficulties associated with collecting data on kidnapping incidents. Lastly, kidnapping events that end with ransom payments are often kept confidential to prevent embarrassment or legal implications for the state, corporate, and/or private parties involved. In other words, there are many reasons that kidnappings may go underreported.

Second, our dataset is limited to the kidnapping of Westerners and does not include information about the kidnapping of local nationals, which is a significant phenomenon in its own right. It is possible that the dynamics of local kidnapping differ significantly from that of the kidnapping of Westerners. Thus, policymakers and practitioners should be careful in extrapolating our findings as they are not representative of terrorism-related kidnappings as a broader phenomenon.

Third, some information about hostage incidents is simply not known. Some incidents draw large amounts of attention and reporting, while others are only mentioned in passing. While CTC researchers attempted to identify as much information as possible about each event, not all events are completely coded. To provide transparency, this study will indicate the number of observations for all statistical claims.

Fourth, the data collected is subject to reporting biases distinct from those already discussed. Kidnappings by jihadist groups are currently well covered by media outlets. The possibility exists that Western kidnappings elsewhere in the world are significantly underreported by media outlets and, thus, underrepresented in our data. Additionally, researchers only conducted research using English-language sources, creating the possibility that citizens of English-speaking nations are overrepresented.

Finally, the time window we assess for Section 2 (Kidnapping of Westerners, 2001–2015) is limited. This temporal limitation was mostly due to the fact that the resources required to do a data collection effort for a much larger temporal span exceeded what that available. Despite these limitations, we believe that this data collection and analysis will, at the very least, serve as a starting point for other researchers to provide more fidelity on kidnapping trends and conduct more detailed analysis in the future.

38 Joel Simon, “Is it time to end media blackouts?” *Columbia Journalism Review*, 9 September 2014.

Section 1: Kidnapping in Historical Perspective (1970–2013)

Each individual kidnapping incident has its own unique challenges and manifestations. In some cases, the perpetrators kill hostages quickly. In others, hostages are released after negotiations. While the subsequent section in this report conducts a more nuanced investigation of kidnappings perpetrated by jihadist groups against Westerners, using the CTC-created dataset described above, in this section we temporarily set aside some of these nuances to conduct a macro-level examination of all kidnapping incidents perpetrated by terrorists (not just those against Westerners) from 1970 to 2013 using the GTD dataset. We argue that such an examination offers important contextual information for understanding the challenge posed by current kidnapping events.

A starting point for this macro-level examination is to understand the frequency of kidnapping events by terrorist organizations over time. Figure 1 presents a graph showing the number of kidnapping incidents each year by terrorists between 1970 and 2013. During this period there were 7,048 hostage incidents listed in the GTD, with a yearly average of about 164. The year with the highest number of incidents (630) was 2013. The solid line in Figure 1 represents the total number of incidents in each year. The number of incidents rose gradually (with the exception of 1998) until the early 2000s. It declined from 178 in 2001 to 67 in 2003. After this point, the number of kidnappings rose dramatically through 2013.

Some may argue that the increase in kidnappings by terrorists since 2003 is solely related to the emergence of specific groups in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the increased presence of foreigners in those countries. The data shows, however, that the rise in incidents is not solely attributable to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The dashed line in Figure 1 represents the total number of incidents in each year, minus the incidents that took place in Iraq or Afghanistan. Although there were a significant number of hostage incidents in Iraq and Afghanistan after 2003 (approximately 25% of the overall total during this time period), it is clear that these two countries are not solely responsible for the overall increase in kidnapping incidents over the past decade. Based on this data, it appears to be a tactic that has broad appeal beyond these conflict areas.

Figure 1: GTD Hostage (Kidnapping) Incidents Over Time

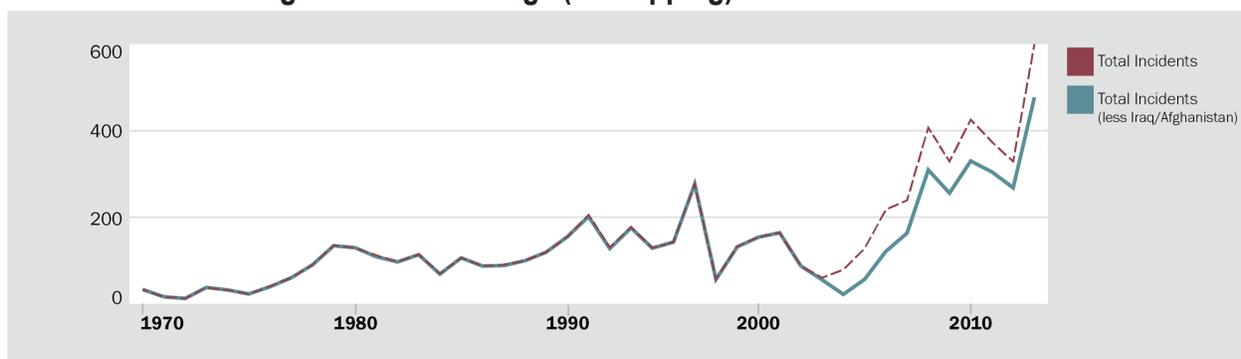
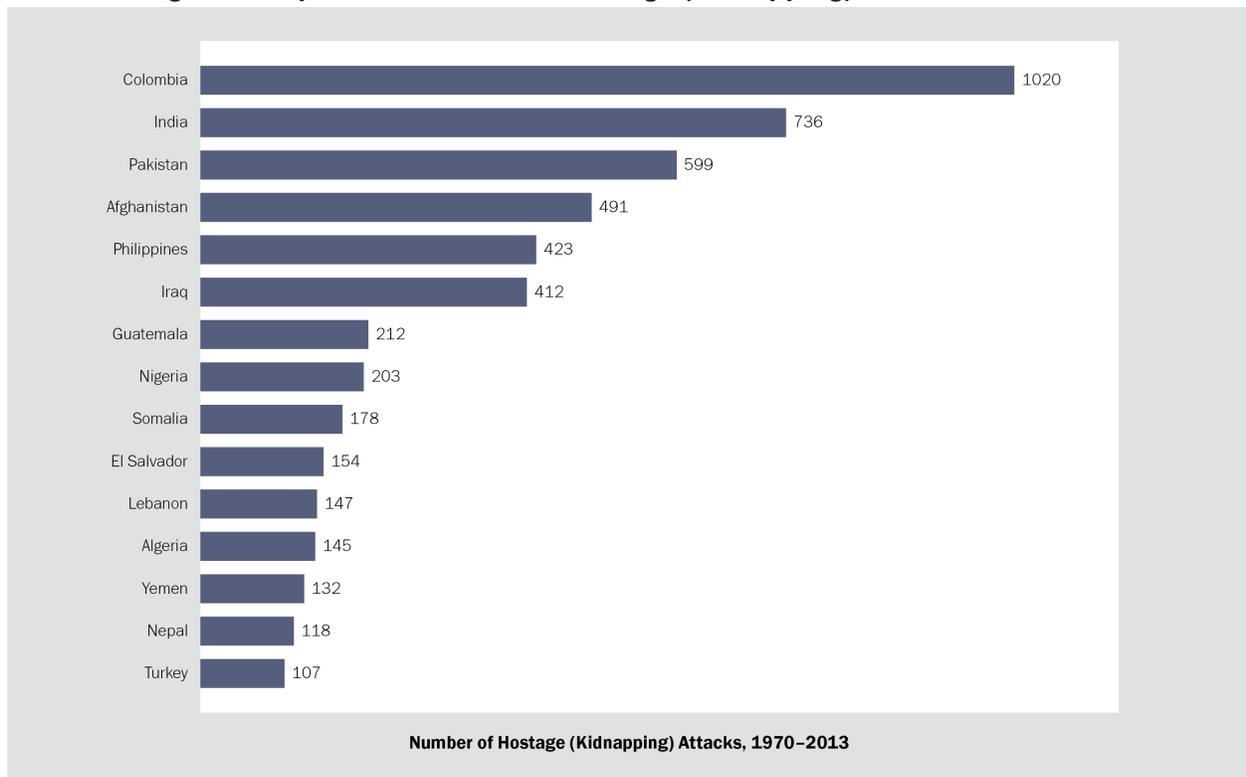


Figure 2: Top 15 Countries With Hostage (Kidnapping) Attacks; 1970–2013



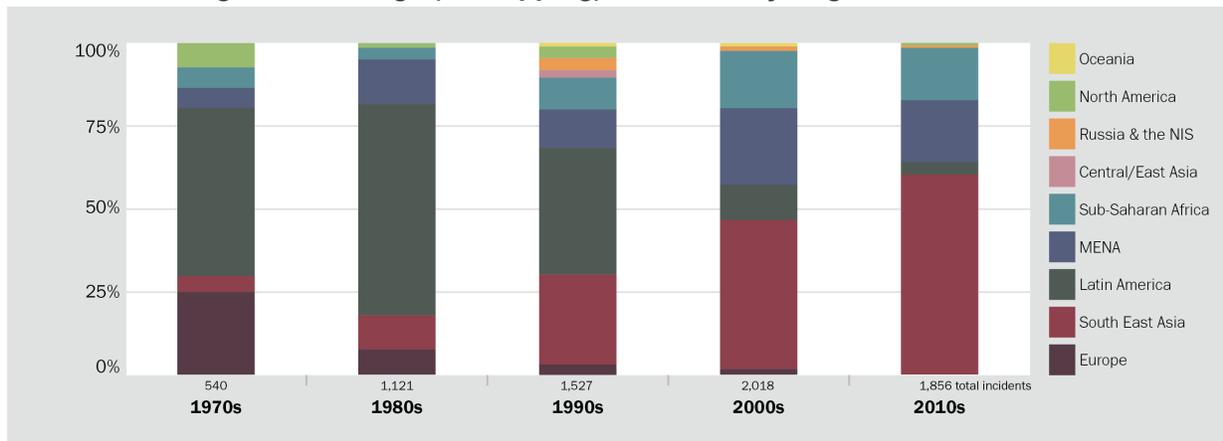
The broad geographic spread of these incidents is clearly seen in the data. Figure 2 presents the top 15 countries in terms of kidnapping incidents from 1970 to 2013. There are a couple of interesting takeaways. The first is the fact that domestic instability and conflict appear to be drivers of kidnappings. Colombia, which has been torn apart by the violence between rebel groups (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, National Liberation Army) on one side and self-defense groups (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) on the other, has seen the largest number of these incidents over time. It is followed by other countries experiencing instability such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, and Nigeria. Kidnapping may be an attractive tactic regardless of other considerations, but it seems possible that the inflow of foreigners to conflict zones, whether for business, humanitarian or other purposes, creates a certain measure of opportunity for its employment. Another key point is that countries with a long history of these incidents could potentially be important sources of information and understanding both from a tactical and a strategic perspective.³⁹ The geographic spread of this phenomenon also suggests the potential for broad international interest in devising ways to deal with the issue.

A temporal breakdown of the data suggests that the geographic distribution of hostage incidents is shifting, but in ways that emphasize specific regional trends. Figure 3 represents this graphically by presenting the percentage of incidents occurring within each region across the past five decades. What this chart shows is that there appears to be a geographic shift in terms of where kidnapping occurs most frequently. While it appears to have been most prominent in Latin America and Europe during

39 The government of Colombia conducted its own study of kidnapping from 1970 to 2010. The study included general demographic information of the kidnapping victims (age, occupation, etc.), length of time the victim was held, and the groups responsible for kidnappings. Sibylla Brodzinsky, "Kidnapping in Colombia: The role of abductions in decades-long conflict," *Christian Science Monitor*, 21 June 2013.

the 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s saw a slow shift in the location of these incidents with a greater percentage of the overall number of incidents occurring in South/Southeast Asia and the Middle East / North Africa (MENA) region. The key conclusion from Figure 3 is that, even though kidnapping can appear to be pegged to particular regions or places, the problem does respond to changing conditions. Dealing with the short-term manifestation of the problem is important, but some attention needs to be invested in understanding how the phenomenon is changing and what that means for those charged with addressing this challenge.

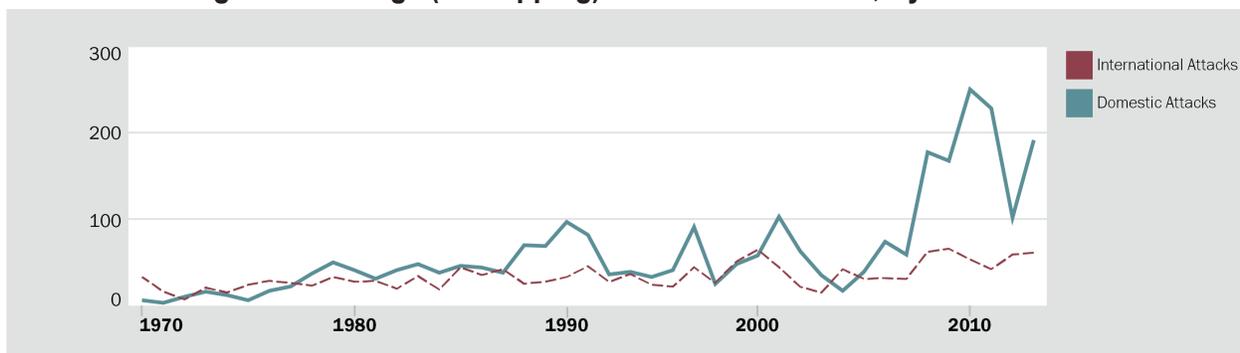
Figure 3: Hostage (Kidnapping) Incidents, By Region and Decade



These previous graphs demonstrate that there are differences across time and space when it comes to the frequency of kidnapping incidents. However, the possibility also exists that such differences exist among the various groups that are using this as a tactic. Assessing these differences at a macro-level is difficult because the existing databases, such as the GTD, often do not have a substantial amount of detail regarding group responsibility for these incidents. For example, of the 7,048 kidnapping incidents in the GTD, 2,558 (~36%) have the group listed as “Unknown.” As discussed, it is important to be aware of the limitations and shortfalls of the data before drawing any inferences. With this caution in mind, we turn to a preliminary examination of the motivations of groups carrying out these incidents over time.

A graphical representation of one method for assessing group motivations can be seen in Figure 4, which separates attacks into those that are international in nature and those that are domestic in nature. The method GTD uses assigns a nationality to each perpetrating group and compares that to the nationality of the victim of their attack (in this case, a hostage). If the two codes differ, attacks are considered by the GTD methodology to be ideologically international. The number of incidents for which this determination can be made is 3,976 (56% of the total number of kidnapping incidents in the GTD).

Figure 4: Hostage (Kidnapping) Incidents Over Time, By Motivation



To the extent that inferences can be drawn from the data, Figure 4 provides an interesting perspective on kidnapping. While there has been a rise in the number of hostage incidents over time, that growth appears to have been fueled by an increase in domestically oriented kidnappings. The number of international incidents appears to have been relatively stable over the past few decades. This finding draws out an important point about working with international partners. For many partners, the most important part of the issue will be the large proportion of local individuals who were kidnapped.

This may differ for Western partners, who experience relatively few kidnapping incidents, particularly by terrorist actors. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, but it remains a general trend in the data.

This section of the report provided a macro-level analysis of kidnapping incidents from the GTD, the world’s largest open-source database of terrorist incidents. The analysis showed that, although such incidents are not new, the phenomenon has shifted geographically and grown over time. In the next section of this report, we shift toward a more focused evaluation of kidnapping incidents perpetrated against Western citizens from 2001 to 2015.

Section 2: The Kidnapping of Westerners by Non-State Actors (2001–2015)

Understanding the broad scope of the kidnapping threat by non-state actors is an essential part of grappling with the threat to Western citizens from jihadist groups. It is important to note at the outset that, compared to other terrorist events and the associated casualties of those events, relatively few Westerners are kidnapped by non-state actors generally and jihadist groups more specifically. However, it may be the case that the relatively rare nature of kidnapping events is also part of the reason that they have an impact much larger than the numbers alone would suggest. Even within these incidents though, there is variation in the amount of media attention. In some cases, when individuals are held by terrorist groups, their captivities can receive a very large amount of media attention.⁴⁰ In the aftermath of the abduction, terrorist groups often release videos of their victims, whose families might issue public pleas. All of this adds to the drama and emotion that dominates these incidents. When kidnappings unfold in a high-profile way, the general public is more sympathetic to the victims than they are to the casualties of terrorist attacks or the faceless victims of violence elsewhere.⁴¹ Combined with the perception that the victim's life may be spared through government action, kidnapping events can place intense public pressure on governments. In this environment of intense public scrutiny, public officials can find it difficult to both analyze and execute the best course of action, particularly given gaps in our understanding of these types of incidents.

This section of the report will provide descriptive data intended to provide context for discussions on policies to deter, prevent, and respond to the kidnapping of Western citizens. Specifically, it will examine the overall numbers and trends over time of kidnapping events of Western citizens as well as the regions and countries where most kidnappings of Westerners occur. Finally, this section will provide descriptive data on the nationality and occupation of kidnapping victims and discuss trends that might inform preventive policies.

When, Where and by Whom are Westerners Kidnapped?

Within the CTC Hostage Dataset there are 657 kidnapping incidents of Western⁴² citizens since 2001. Of the 1,485 individuals abducted in these incidents, a significant number, 406 (27%), were taken by groups who are unknown, or remain unreported. This large number of non-attributed kidnappings, in addition to underscoring the difficulty of such a collection, merits mention of two other points.

First, it is possible that our findings contrasting jihadist and other non-state actor kidnappings might shift if large portions of these unknown kidnappings were conducted by jihadist groups. Some incidents may remain unattributed simply because of a lack of evidence. It is also possible some jihadist or militant groups seek anonymity intentionally, understanding the pressures on Western governments not to negotiate with terrorist groups. While increased research efforts or future revelations about past incidents, might shift some of the findings of the report, this report does not provide any speculation about their impact.⁴³

Second, although there is some potential for error due to the number of unknown cases, this category may remain useful. In the course of kidnapping events, policymakers and practitioners must often

40 This high level of publicity stands in stark contrast to other cases where media attention is almost non-existent due to a variety of factors such as the availability of information or requests by governments or families to limit public release of information.

41 One point made by a reviewer was that increasing the human element of the incident is often a deliberate tactic employed by law enforcement agencies and negotiators to humanize the victim, prevent harm, and encourage better treatment overall, including humanitarian release. Of course, kidnappers may also selectively employ this tactic to increase pressure on governments.

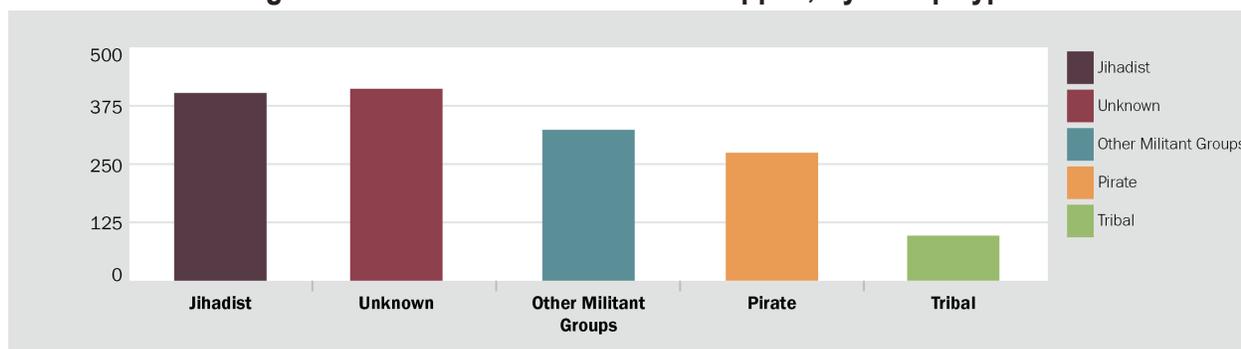
42 For clarity on the term "Western" used throughout this section please see the description provided in the introduction.

43 To be clear, incidents were not classified as "Unknown" without extensive research effort directed toward identification of the perpetrators. Additional research using non-English language sources may assist identify the groups responsible for the kidnapping.

make decisions with imperfect information. It is our hope that this data, especially if examined by the country where the victim was taken, might help provide a baseline for discussions of responses to kidnappings.

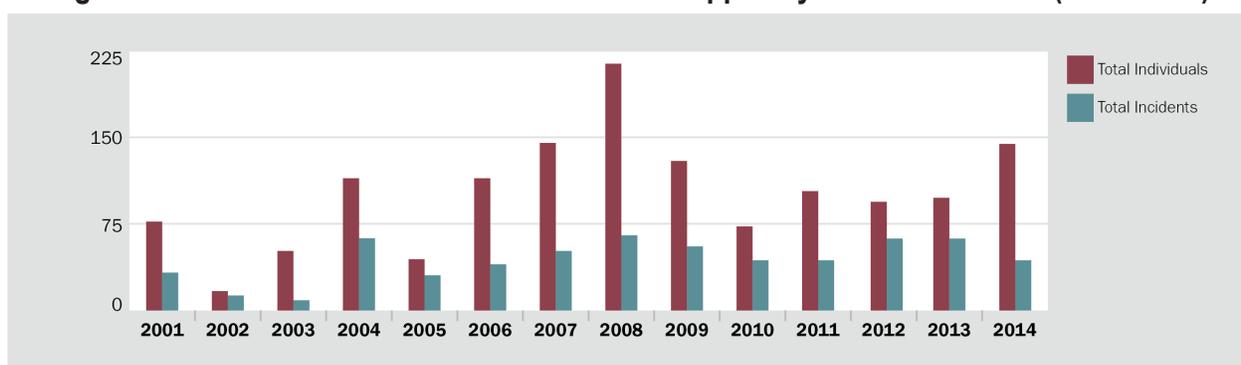
Of the cases where the perpetrators were known, jihadist groups were responsible for most of the captives, kidnapping (or holding) 399 (Figure 5). Other terrorist and militant groups account for 319 abductions, while 266 of the abductions were related to piracy. The smallest number of kidnapping events, 95, can be linked to tribal or indigenous groups.

Figure 5: Number of Individuals Kidnapped, By Group Type



Despite fluctuations the number of Westerners kidnapped by non-state actors has increased overall since 2001, although it has been gradual and not exponential (Figure 6). Although there is a general increase in the number of Western victims, the total number of kidnapping incidents has remained relatively stable over time. From 2001–2014 there were, on average, 44 kidnapping events by non-state actors each year.⁴⁴ These incidents peaked in 2008 during the heyday of Somali piracy, with 67 abductions and a total of 218 victims⁴⁵, but fell off sharply thereafter in 2009 and 2010, before increasing again.

Figure 6: Number of Incidents & Individuals Kidnapped by Non-State Actors (2001–2014)



If, however, we separate out kidnappings of Westerners by jihadist groups from incidents perpetrated by other types of non-state actors, an interesting difference emerges (Figures 7 and 8): jihadist groups seem to be the prime movers behind the 2010–2014 increase in the total number of individuals being kidnapped. While the number of both jihadist kidnapping incidents and victims generally increased between 2001 and 2014, there has been a sharper increase from 2010 to 2014, specifically in the

44 For the time period 2001–2014, there were a mean of 45.3 and median of 44.5 non-state actor kidnapping incidents.

45 Pirate groups were responsible for 14 incidents and 114 victims in 2008.

number of victims (Figure 7). Between 2001 and 2009, jihadist groups conducted, on average, eight kidnapping incidents per year.⁴⁶ From 2010 to 2014, however, that number increased to 17 incidents per year.⁴⁷ Although there is significant variance in number of victims over the years, examining the median across these years shows an increase from 17 Western victims of jihadist kidnapping between 2001 and 2009 to 29 victims between 2010 and 2014.⁴⁸ Other non-state actor groups, conversely, show fairly stable kidnapping incident rates and a decrease in the number of victims kidnapped (Figure 8).⁴⁹

Figure 7: Number of Incidents & Individuals Kidnapped by Jihadist Groups (2001–2014)

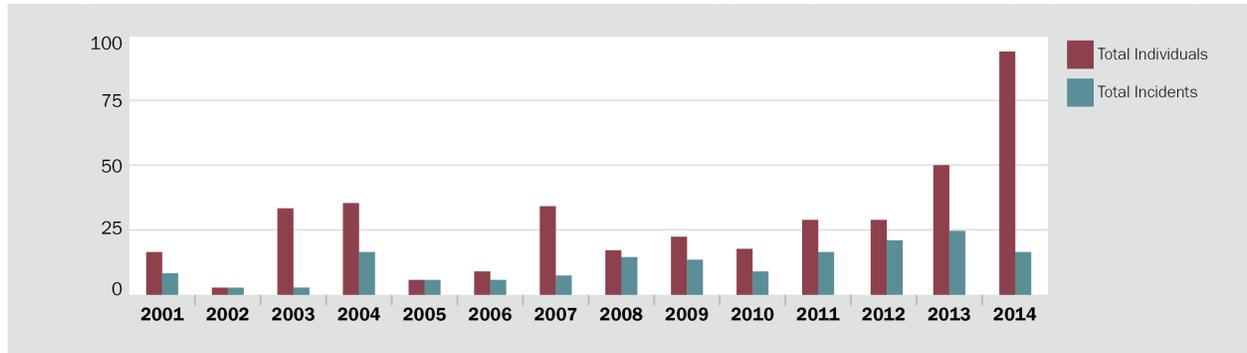
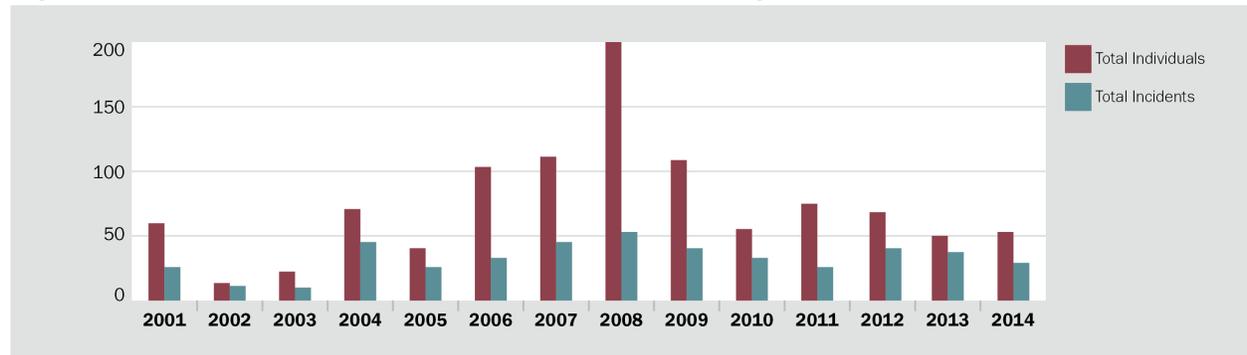


Figure 8: Number of Incidents & Individuals Kidnapped by Other Non-State Actors (2001–2014)



Jihadist increases have been most dramatic in 2013 and 2014, when their activity accounted for 38% and 36% of the total number of kidnapping incidents, respectively.⁵⁰ During those same two years, despite registering fewer incidents than other non-state actors, jihadist groups kidnapped 50% and 64% of the total number of Western victims. Interestingly, while the Islamic State is responsible for the majority of the 2014 kidnappings (84%), the 2013 increase in abductions was spread more evenly across jihadist groups.

These percentages bring to light another important finding: jihadist groups seem more likely to conduct mass kidnappings than other non-state actor group types. Jihadist groups have one of the highest

46 For the time period 2001–2009, there is a mean of 8.4 and median of eight Sunni jihadist kidnapping incidents.

47 For the time period 2010–2014, there is a mean of 17.4 and median of 17 Sunni jihadist kidnapping incidents.

48 For the time period 2001–2009, there is a mean of 19.4 and median of 17 Sunni jihadist kidnapping victims, while for the time period 2010–2014, there is a mean of 44.2 and median of 29 jihadist kidnapping victims.

49 Means and median numbers for all other non-state actor types are as follows:
Incidents: 2001–2009; mean 33.1, median 33.5 / 2010–2014; mean 34.6, median, 33.5
Victims: 2001–2009; mean 72.4, median 62 / 2010–2014; mean 61.2, median 57.

50 Only 2011 has a higher proportion of Sunni jihadist / total kidnapping incidents at 39%.

rates of average victims captured per incident, 3.03, yet they also have the highest variance between their mean and median numbers, which may indicate that their high rate is primarily a function of mass kidnappings (Table 1). They have the highest, single-yearly, victim-per-incident rate (16.5 victims per incident in 2003)⁵¹ and are the only group type to have captured more than 30 individuals in a single occasion.⁵² While the variation across years makes it difficult to identify the group type more prone to kidnapping multiple victims in the same occurrence, it is clear that jihadist groups have historically captured the largest number of victims in single cases.

Table 1: Western Victims per Kidnapping Incident

Group Type	Highest Yearly Rate	Mean	Median	Variance
Jihadist	16.5	3.03	1.7	1.33
Pirate	8.1	3.20	2.0	1.20
Unknown	7.5	1.90	1.5	0.40
Tribal	5.8	2.40	1.7	0.70
Other Militant Groups	3.6	2.20	1.75	0.45

It is also worth noting that 2015 appears to be trending toward a reduction in total and jihadist kidnappings.⁵³ Through mid-July when data collection ended, 29 people have been abducted, only three of which (10%) can be attributed to jihadist groups. It is possible that this apparent decrease is due to the large amount of publicity given to very gruesome beheadings in recent years. Such publicity may have impacted the number of individuals traveling to high-risk areas, or, at the very least, increased their awareness of the threat and the importance of taking extra precautions.

Two important factors, however, must be taken into account before discussing trends in 2015. First, media reporting is not often available for kidnapping events until after the release of the victim due to blackouts requested by governments and families. In some cases, victims wait until years after an incident before speaking about their captivities.⁵⁴ It is likely that a fuller understanding of kidnappings in 2015 will not be possible until well into 2016. The percentage of jihadist-perpetrated kidnappings will also shift as more incidents come to light. Over half of the current 2015 abductions (62%) have been conducted by groups yet to be identified in open-source reporting, and it is possible that some of these incidents have been conducted by jihadist groups. Thus, while 2015 abductions will be used to discuss overall numbers, discussions of trends over time will use only data from 2001 through 2014.

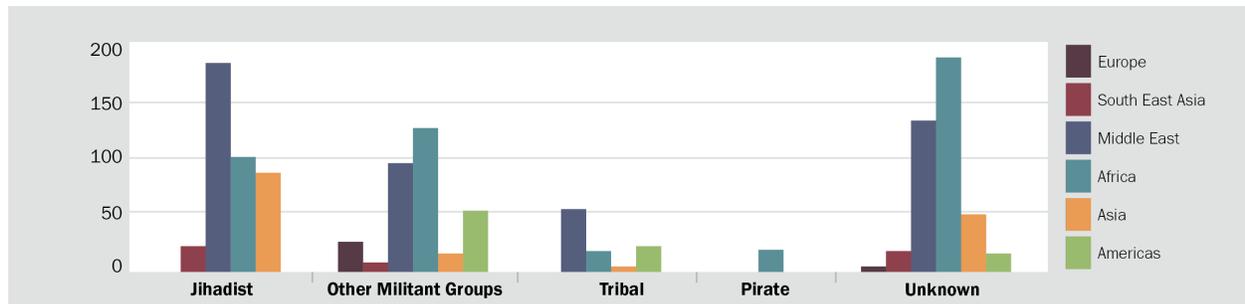
51 This is due to the abduction of 32 European tourists in by the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) in Algeria. While technically the abductions were spread across a few days, they are widely considered part of the same event and were perpetrated by the same unit.

52 Jihadist groups have captured more than 30 victims three times, once in 2003 and twice in 2013. These incidents will be addressed in the paper where appropriate.

53 The previous section referred to both incidents and individuals kidnapped as units of observation. From this point forward in the report, the unit of observation will be the number of individuals kidnapped.

54 For instance, we found no at-the-time media reporting for the kidnapping of Jere Van Dyk, a journalist taken captive and released in early 2008. Van Dyk did not discuss his story with the media until 2010.

Figure 9: Westerners Kidnapped, By Group Type and Region⁵⁵



We can also examine kidnappings of Westerners by region. According to our data, most Western citizens are kidnapped in the Middle East and Africa, 38% and 37% respectively (Table 2). These two regions rank the highest for the three largest group types; jihadists, other militant groups, and unknown groups (Figure 9). Jihadist kidnappings represent the plurality of incidents in the Middle East (40%).⁵⁶

Additionally, of the total kidnappings attributed to jihadist groups, the highest percentage of such kidnappings (47%) occurred in the Middle East. Conversely, while Africa accounts for the second-highest number of jihadist abductions, most of the kidnappings in Africa (77%) are conducted by other types of non-state actors.⁵⁷ Continental Asia ranks third for all non-state actor kidnappings (12%) and all jihadist kidnappings (22%).

Table 2: Total and Jihadist Westerner Abduction Rates, by Region⁵⁸

	Africa	Americas	Asia	Europe	Middle East	South East Asia
Total Abductions	456	88	154	27	469	43
Jihadist Abductions	103	0	88	0	187	21

When viewed over time, the geographic shift in kidnapping incidents away from Latin America and toward Africa and the Middle East discussed in Section 1 is also reflected in the kidnapping of Westerners (Figure 10). It is also evident that kidnapping in the Middle East and Africa is a pervasive problem. Despite fluctuations over time, both regions frequently dominate the yearly totals. That said, while the number of African abductions has remained fairly constant from 2010 to 2014, there has been a steady increase kidnappings in the Middle East over the same time period.⁵⁹

The Middle East and Africa continue to be important in jihadist kidnappings, however, African involvement in such events is less pervasive than in overall kidnappings (Figure 11). It is also interesting to note that while a high percentage of kidnapping events early in the 2000s occurred in South East

55 The gross number of abductions represented in the graph will not match the total abduction number of 1,485, because sea-borne abductions were not included in the regional breakdown.

56 Twenty percent of Middle Eastern kidnappings are conducted by other militant groups, 12% by tribal groups, and 28% are conducted by unknown groups.

57 The majority of Westerner abductions in Africa are conducted by unknown groups (42%). Other militant groups account for 28% of abductions in Africa, Sunni jihadist groups for 23%, while pirate and tribal groups have conducted 4% of the kidnappings in the region.

58 The gross number of abductions represented in the table will not match the total abduction number of 1,485, because sea-borne abductions were not included in the regional breakdown.

59 Africa accounted for 48% of all kidnappings in 2010, yet only 15% in 2014. The number of abductions in Africa, however, remained consistent over that time period with a mean of 28.8 and a median of 30 abductions per year. Both the percentage and gross number of total kidnappings in the Middle East grew from seven abductions (13%) in 2010 to 99 abductions (66%) in 2014.

Asia, in recent years, jihadist groups in that region have not utilized the tactic as often as jihadist groups in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

Figure 10: Westerners Kidnapped by Non-State Actors, by Region (2001–2014)

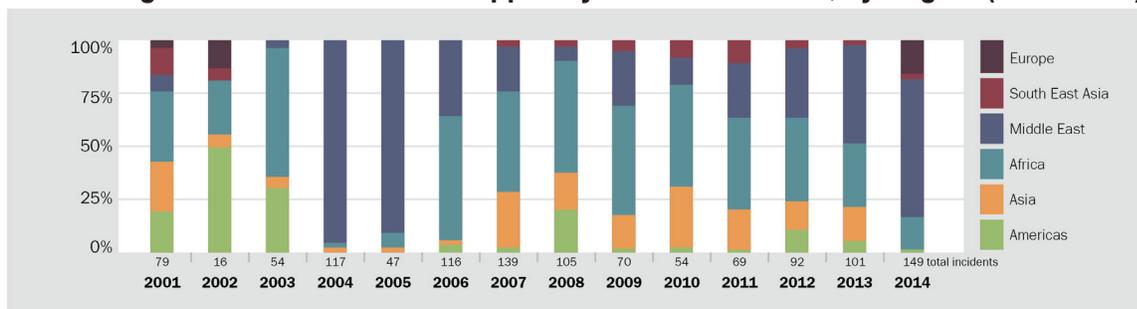
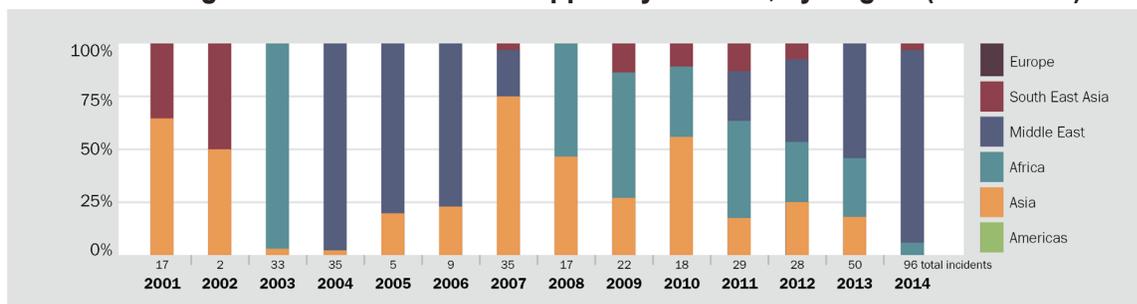


Figure 11: Westerners Kidnapped by Jihadist, by Region (2001–2014)



Perhaps not surprisingly, most of the countries that rank highest in kidnapping events suffer from chronic political instability and weak governance. Most of these countries have also had terrorist or militant groups able to operate with some sort of safe haven or territorial control. The top three countries in total kidnappings have also had a target rich environment (Table 3). Iraq and Afghanistan have seen significant Western presence due to long-term military conflicts and the journalists, government employees, contractors, and aid workers that have accompanied the ongoing state-building efforts. Interestingly, the majority of Nigeria’s abductions have been perpetrated by groups associated with the restive Niger Delta region which have access to a target-rich environment thanks to the significant presence of Western citizens working in the oil industry there, rather than the Islamic State-aligned terrorist group Boko Haram.

Determining the regions and countries where the abductions of Western citizens take place is an important part of scoping the problem. It is evident that conditions in Africa and the Middle East play an important role in this issue, as seen by their significant proportion of yearly kidnapping events. It is also clear that political instability, weak governance, terrorist groups with territorial control, and ongoing conflicts can cause and/or exacerbate the problem, especially when Western citizens are present in large numbers. While this is important to understand, it is also less helpful from a policy perspective. The conditions cited above are exactly the conditions that draw certain professions. Western aid workers and journalists, for instance, seek out such environments to provide assistance or to understand the conditions.

Table 3: 20 Highest Ranking Countries Where Westerners Have Been Abducted

Total Kidnappings		Jihadist Kidnappings	
Iraq	245	Iraq	129
Nigeria	192	Afghanistan	74
Afghanistan	115	Syria	41
Yemen	84	Algeria	37
Syria	66	Philippines	21
Palestinian Territory	49	Niger	14
Colombia	48	Pakistan	14
Somalia	38	Yemen	12
Algeria	37	Cameroon	11
Niger	37	Mali	11
Philippines	37	Nigeria	8
Egypt	28	Somalia	6
Pakistan	26	Mauritania	6
Libya	23	Kenya	5
Ukraine	23	Palestinian Territory	4
Sudan	18	Libya	3
Kenya	12	Tunisia	2
Cameroon	11	Saudi Arabia	1
Mali	11		
DRC	10		

To further illustrate the complexity of this issue and the government response, this analysis also examines the different characteristics of the kidnapping victims, specifically focusing on their nationality and occupation.

Does Victim Nationality Matter?

Many discussions regarding kidnapping by non-state actors such as terrorist organizations revolve around one critical piece of information about the victim: nationality. The question of the victim’s nationality usually spurs discussion about the policies of different states when it comes to negotiations with non-state actors and terrorist groups. To be clear, this report does not intend to answer the question of the impact of negotiations on future terrorist abductions and targeting. However, this report can provide some insights and additional empirical data to a discussion that has historically been based on anecdotes and assumptions.

This section begins with a macro-level examination of the kidnapping of Westerners. We find there is remarkable consistency in the countries affected by non-state actor kidnapping. To illustrate this point, we group the number of total kidnappings, jihadist kidnappings, and all other non-state actor kidnappings of Westerners by their country of nationality. Of the 32 nations represented in the CTC dataset, seven (Turkey, United States, Italy, United Kingdom, France, Germany, and South Korea) consistently appeared in the top ten affected countries across all three categories (Table 4). Interestingly, while the United States, Italy, and the United Kingdom have higher numbers of total abductions, they rank behind France and Germany when the data is sorted by percentage of jihadist abductions.⁶⁰ A

60 Sunni jihadist kidnappings make up 30.9% of French and 27.6% of German abductions, while they make up 22.6% of U.S., 17.5% of Italian, and 16.8% of UK abductions.

related point is that the majority of Western kidnapping cases are concentrated among a small number of OECD nations. The top ten countries, representing roughly 30% of the 34 OECD countries, account for more than 80% of the kidnappings across all categories.⁶¹ The top six countries (18% of OECD countries) account for more than 60% of the cases across all three categories.⁶² While many countries are affected by kidnapping, the majority of victims come from a small number of countries.

Table 4: Ten Highest Ranking Western Countries Affected by Non-State Actor Abductions

Total Kidnappings		Jihadist Groups		All Other Non-State Actors	
Turkey	230	Turkey	119	United States	130
United States	168	France	42	Italy	127
Italy	154	United States	38	United Kingdom	124
United Kingdom	149	Germany	34	Turkey	111
France	136	Italy	27	France	94
Germany	123	United Kingdom	25	Germany	89
South Korea	97	South Korea	25	South Korea	72
Spain	60	Switzerland	14	Greece	53
Greece	55	Austria	14	Spain	51
Canada	32	Canada	12	Netherlands	22

One might be tempted to assess that the reason these countries experience the most kidnappings is the higher value of their citizens in the eyes of non-state actors compared to citizens of other countries. However, the possibility also exists that certain nationalities are over represented among the target set rather than being solely (or even primarily) targeted by the non-state actor.

There are significant challenges to adjudicating between these two explanations. Any attempt to simply place the discussion in context would require a knowledge of all the foreigners present in the country, region, and local area where non-state actor abductions have taken place. This would allow us to begin assessing if French citizens get kidnapped more than U.S. citizens do in Algeria because groups target French citizens more or if there are simply more of them to begin with. This information is largely unavailable in the detail needed to conduct this analysis.

A second challenge is that proving or disproving the premise that non-state actors conduct nation-specific targeting would require an extensive understanding of the details of the planning processes leading up to the abduction of Westerners. Specifically, it would require a knowledge of (1) whether or not the perpetrators knew the victim’s country of origin prior to their abduction and (2) whether or not the abduction was planned or opportunistic.

Consider the example of Santiago Lopez Mendez, an Argentine agricultural engineer, kidnapped by unidentified gunmen in Nigeria in June 2015.⁶³ Mendez, who had lived in Nigeria since June 2014, was abducted while working in a field outside Machagu, Nigeria. According to witnesses, his assailants drove up on motorcycles, fired guns into the air, placed Mendez in his vehicle, and drove away with him.⁶⁴ His assailants seem to have abducted Mendez without knowing specifically where he was from. According to one news source, immediately after the kidnapping local police officers speculated he

61 The top ten countries represent 29.4% of the 34 OECD nations; 81.1% of total kidnappings, 79.5% of Sunni jihadist kidnappings, and 83.5% of all other non-state actor kidnappings.

62 The top six countries represent 17.6% of the 34 OECD nations; 64.7% of total kidnappings, 71.6% of Sunni jihadist kidnappings, and 62.2% of all other non-state actor kidnappings.

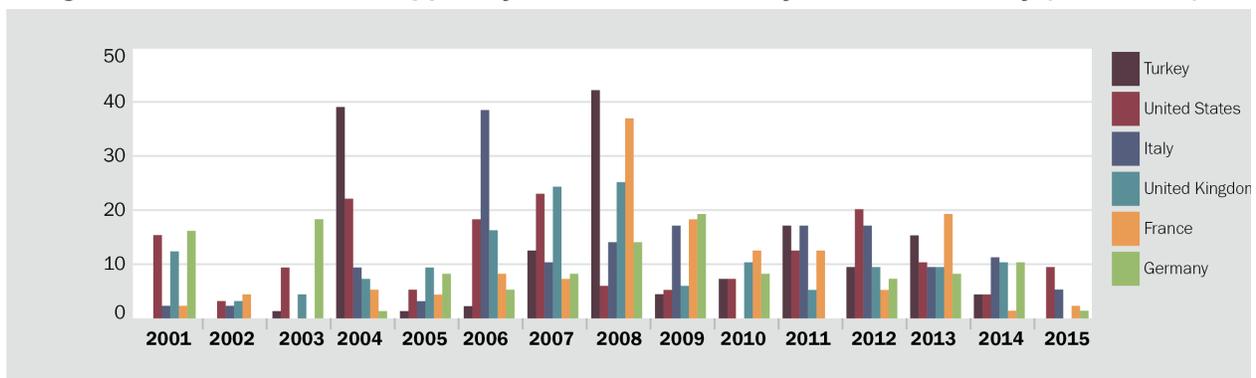
63 Although Mendez is not a citizen of an OECD country and, thus, his case is not included in the CTC dataset, the authors felt the details of his particular case are likely representative of broader kidnapping dynamics.

64 “Argentine kidnapped in Nigeria by armed group,” *Buenos Aires Herald*, 24 June 2015.

was abducted “because he [was] white.” After Mendez was released he revealed that his assailants, who spoke little English, became confused when he attempted to explain he was from Argentina, mistaking “South America” for “American.”⁶⁵ This incident illustrates the potential difficulties that non-state actors might have in identifying the victim’s country of origin, let alone understanding what they know and when they know it.

Whether or not the targeting is deliberate, there are still interesting differences between the Western countries whose citizens are kidnapped most frequently. The remaining analysis in this report will be conducted using the six-highest-ranking countries across total, jihadist, and all other non-state actor kidnappings. As previously noted, Turkey, the United States, Italy, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany remain constant across the different categories. Additionally, they also each have sample sizes of more than 25 jihadist kidnapping victims, allowing for a better determination of trends.⁶⁶ The information from these countries will be used to provide descriptive data on and identify trends within kidnapping events by the type of group that perpetrated the abduction, temporal trends, and the region in which it occurred.

Figure 12: Westerners Kidnapped by Non-State Actors, by Select Nationality (2001–2014)⁶⁷



We begin by examining the trends that exist among our six focus countries across the span of the dataset. Several spikes can be seen for both total and jihadist kidnappings (Figure 12 and Figure 13). Some of these are particular mass kidnapping events, while others can be traced to important events and conditions in particular regions and countries. Some of the noticeable datapoints include:

- » The 2004 kidnapping spree in Iraq, significantly impacting Turkish and U.S. citizens.
- » The 2006 kidnapping of 22 Italian citizens in Niger by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of the Sahara (FARS).⁶⁸
- » The impact of seaborne kidnappings on Turkish and French sailors in the Gulf of Aden in 2008.

65 Mariana Iglesias, “El argentino secuestrado en Nigeria: “Nombrarlo a Messi me salvó la vida.” *Clarín*, 28 June 2015.

66 Although South Korea is the seventh-highest ranking country in all three categories and also has 25 cases of Sunni jihadist kidnappings, it has been excluded from the rest of the analysis because the majority (92%) of its 26 Sunni jihadist victims were taken in the same event: the 2007 abduction of 23 South Korean missionaries in Afghanistan. While Germany’s data is also impacted by a single event: the 2007 abduction of 23 South Korean missionaries in Afghanistan. While Germany’s data is also impacted by a single incident (16 German tourists were kidnapped with other European tourists by the GSPC in Algeria in 2003), these abductions account for just under half (47%) of all German victims of Sunni jihadist groups.

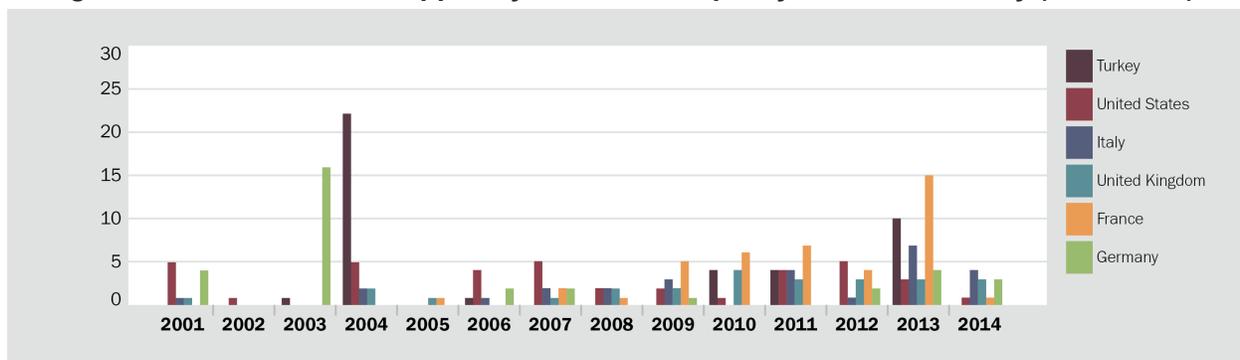
67 The 77 Turkish citizens kidnapped in 2014 have been omitted to reveal other trends. The actual number of abductions in 2014 in the CTC Database is 121.

68 “2 Tourists Kidnapped in Niger Return Home,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 October 2006.

» The 2014 kidnapping of 77 Turkish consulate workers and truck drivers by the Islamic State.⁶⁹

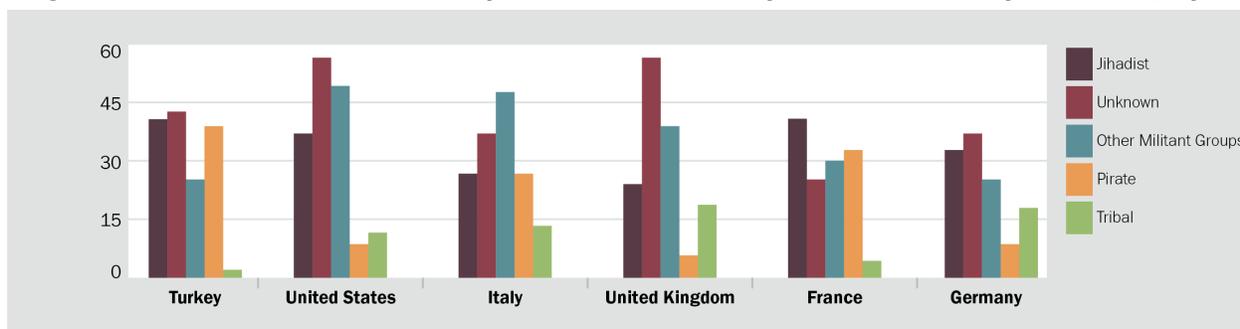
During the course of this analysis, the 2014 kidnapping of 77 Turkish citizens emerges as a very large outlier. While this incident is generally included in the study, it will periodically be removed to highlight trends that its inclusion may overshadow.⁷⁰ The removal of data related to this incident is noted when it occurs.

Figure 13: Westerners Kidnapped by Jihadist Groups, by Select Nationality (2001–2014)⁷¹



Although some of the spikes in the data appear to be related to conditions in which intra-state conflict and terrorist groups with territorial control converge (Iraq 2004/2014), this is not always the case. For instance, the spike in kidnappings of French citizens by jihadist organizations in 2013 is spread across seven different countries (Cameroon, Mali, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen). So, while clusters and conditions may tell us part of the story, other factors are at play. While subsequent analyses will explore some of the trends associated with these kidnappings, this macro-level look suggests that, as in the kidnapping of French citizens in 2013, sometimes timing and chance play an important role.

Figure 14: Westerners Kidnapped by Non-State Actors, by Select Nationality and Group Type



An examination of the kidnapping rates across different types of non-state actors shows that jihadist groups, unknown groups, and other militant groups are generally similar across nationality type while sea-based and tribal abduction rates tend to be less significant (Figure 14). Two exceptions are France

69 "Press Release Regarding the Raid on our Consulate General in Mosul," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Turkey, 11 June 2014.

70 This is because the events 1) ended in the wholesale release of the victims, 2) were committed by the Islamic State, and 3) account for 19.3% of all Sunni jihadist cases in the database. The inclusion of these events has the potential to skew the results for some analysis, most significantly the outcomes of kidnapping events.

71 The 77 Turkish citizens kidnapped in 2014 have been omitted to reveal other trends. The actual number of abductions by jihadist groups in 2014 in the CTC Database is 90.

and Turkey⁷² which have higher rates of sea-based abductions than other countries. Turkey, France, and Germany all rank higher in jihadist kidnappings than other types of non-state actor abductions. Turkish and German numbers, however, are inflated by three kidnapping incidents in which more than 30 people were abducted (two Turkish and one German). When these cases are not considered, France is the only country that ranks higher in jihadi abductions than other non-state actors, with jihadist abductions accounting for 31% of their overall abductions. The United States ranks second with 23% of its citizens' abductions conducted by jihadists. Jihadist groups represent a sizable number of the overall number of kidnappings, but other militant groups and unknown groups kidnap with similar frequency. This varied threat represents a significant challenge for preventive policies with kidnappings occurring across different group types with a variety of possible motivations and tactics.

The geographical distribution of kidnappings is an important part of the story. Unsurprisingly, an examination of the nationality of the victims by the region of their kidnapping shows the significance of the Middle East and Africa for the six, most-affected nationalities (Figure 15 and Figure 16). However, the importance of these regions is not uniform across the nationality of the victims. While the majority of all abductions of Turkish and U.S. citizens happen in the Middle East, most abductions of Italian, UK, French, and German citizens have occurred in Africa. For Turkey, the United States, France, and Germany, these trends hold even when jihadist abductions are the primary focus. However, focusing only on jihadist kidnappings almost erases these regional differences for Italy and reverses them in the case of the UK.

Figure 15: Westerners Kidnapped by Non-State Actors, by Select Nationality and Region

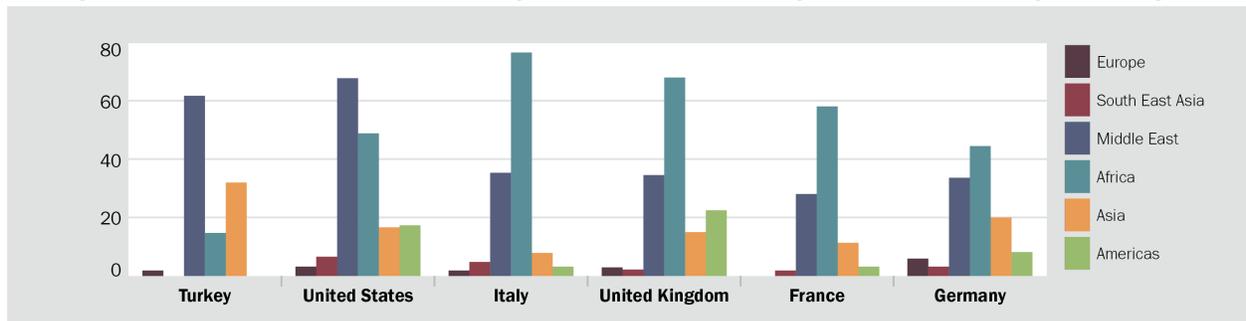
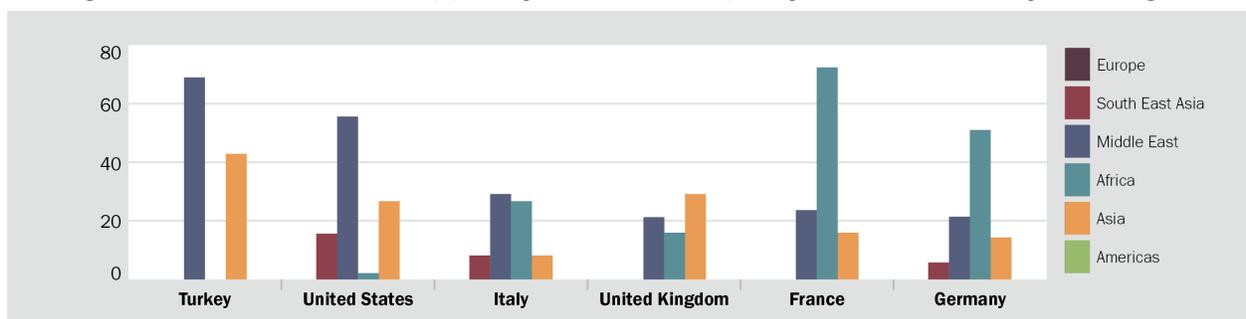


Figure 16: Westerners Kidnapped by Jihadist Groups, by Select Nationality and Region



72 Subsequent analysis in this report will show that a significant portion of Turkey's Sunni jihadist abductions have come from two incidents totaling 77 victims. If these cases are considered outliers and removed from consideration, Turkey still has the most total kidnappings (153) and ties with France for the most Sunni jihadist kidnappings (42), and the percentage of total kidnappings of Turkish citizens perpetrated by Sunni jihadist groups drops from 52% to 18%.

Explanations for the regional variations between nationalities can sometimes be relatively easy to identify. The concentration of abductions of Turkish citizens in the Middle East and Asia, for instance, is driven primarily by abductions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Turkish abduction rates in Iraq (123 total/102 jihadist) and Afghanistan (32 total /16 jihadist) account for 92% of Turkey's total abductions and 99% of its jihadist abductions.⁷³ Proximity alone is likely insufficient to explain the prominence of the Middle East in Turkish kidnappings, because abduction rates for Turkish citizens in countries such as nearby Lebanon or neighboring Syria are much lower. The high rates in Iraq and Afghanistan suggest links between Turkey and the ongoing conflicts in these countries.

While Turkey's Middle Eastern and Asian rates are primarily driven by abductions in one country in each region, the data shows that France's relationship to Africa is more complicated. The significant number of abductions in Africa of French citizens for both total and jihadist kidnappings appears to be a pervasive problem, rather than the result of activity in a single country. The abductions of French citizens in Africa are spread across 14 countries with a fairly even distribution.⁷⁴ Nigeria, for instance, the country where the greatest number French citizens have been kidnapped, accounts for only 19% of all such abductions in Africa. Abductions in Africa for the five other most affected countries take place in fewer countries⁷⁵ and are less evenly distributed. The fact that France has had longstanding colonial and post-colonial relationships and influence in Africa may offer a potential explanation for the higher number of French abductions in this region compared to other parts of the world.⁷⁶ This reinforces the previous discussion about how the makeup of the target population can play an important role in kidnapping dynamics.

Comparatively, jihadist abductions of French citizens, unlike the total numbers of kidnappings, are clustered in just six countries: Algeria, Cameroon, Mali, Nigeria, and Somalia. Of these, the majority of French abductions (81%) by jihadists have happened in just three countries: Cameroon, Niger, and Mali.⁷⁷ Thus, while France citizens appear to be at risk in a number of African countries, the nature of the risk differs by location. In some places, French citizens appear to be a greater risk from jihadist actors, whereas in other locations, jihadist groups are merely one of many threatening actors. Understanding these regional nuances and incorporating as much detail into warning announcements for citizens may be one way that governments can make use of this type of data.

As previously indicated in the opening of this report, there has generally been an increasing trend in the kidnapping of Westerners by jihadists since 2001 and a sharper increase since 2010 (See Figure 17). But, do we see similar trends when we examine specific nationalities? In other words, does the general trend match what we see in relation to kidnappings of American (French, Turkish, etc.) citizens over time? Beyond the question of direction of the trends over time, some have argued that terrorist organizations have identified the nations that negotiate for the release of their citizens and have begun to target accordingly, beyond simply encouraging their followers to kidnap "Westerners."⁷⁸ While we do

73 The removal from consideration of the 77 Turkish consulate workers and truck drivers in 2014 changes the overall numbers, but only slightly reduces the percentages to Iraq/Afghanistan accounting for 85.7% of total abductions and 97.5% of Sunni jihadist abductions.

74 Algeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, and Sudan.

75 Turkey, U.S., Italy, UK, and German abductions in Africa occur on average in eight countries.

76 This report has not attempted to gather travel or visa data from any government to determine rough numbers of their citizens abroad. A collection of this type of data with a comparison to kidnapping rates may help shed some light on the role that the population of victims plays in the kidnapping issue.

77 French Sunni jihadist rates in Africa are as follows: Cameroon: eight*, Niger: eight, Mali: six, Somalia: three, Algeria: one, Nigeria: one.*It is important to note that seven of the eight abductions in Cameroon were due to a single incident; the 2013 kidnapping of Tanguy Moulin-Fournier and six other family members by Boko Haram.

78 Ayman al-Zawahiri urged followers to kidnap Westerners to exchange for Sunni jihadist prisoners, only mentioning Americans specifically. Chelsea J. Carter, "Al Qaeda leader calls for kidnapping of Westerners," CNN, 28 October 2012.

not have data that speaks directly to that question,⁷⁹ if a particular nation's citizens are being targeted by jihadist groups broadly (for whatever reason), this should cause the rate of jihadist abductions for that nation to grow more rapidly than the average increase across all Westerners over time.

Figure 17 offers a potential way to examine this idea. The top box shows jihadist abductions for all Western citizens from 2001 to 2014. The bottom six boxes represent country-specific rates of jihadist abductions over the same period. Each graph includes two trend lines. The solid line shows the trend for the overall time period (2001–2014). The dashed line represents the trend for just 2010–2014, the assumption being that jihadist groups, through experience, have identified in more recent years the countries whose citizens represent the biggest incentive to the group. Again, this may be because the country pays ransoms, because its citizens are more disproportionately covered in the media (giving the group publicity) or for some other reason.

Few of the top six countries, which account for 72% of all jihadist kidnappings, have clear and unambiguous trends that exceed the overall increase in jihadist abductions. Turkey, Italy, and Germany all display generally increasing trends from 2001 to 2014, but Turkish and Italian rates have significant variation between years. German rates have gradually increased since 2010, but the increase does not seem to exceed the overall trend line. The United States and France have had significant variation between years, making trends difficult to determine, while the United Kingdom has seen fairly constant numbers since 2010.

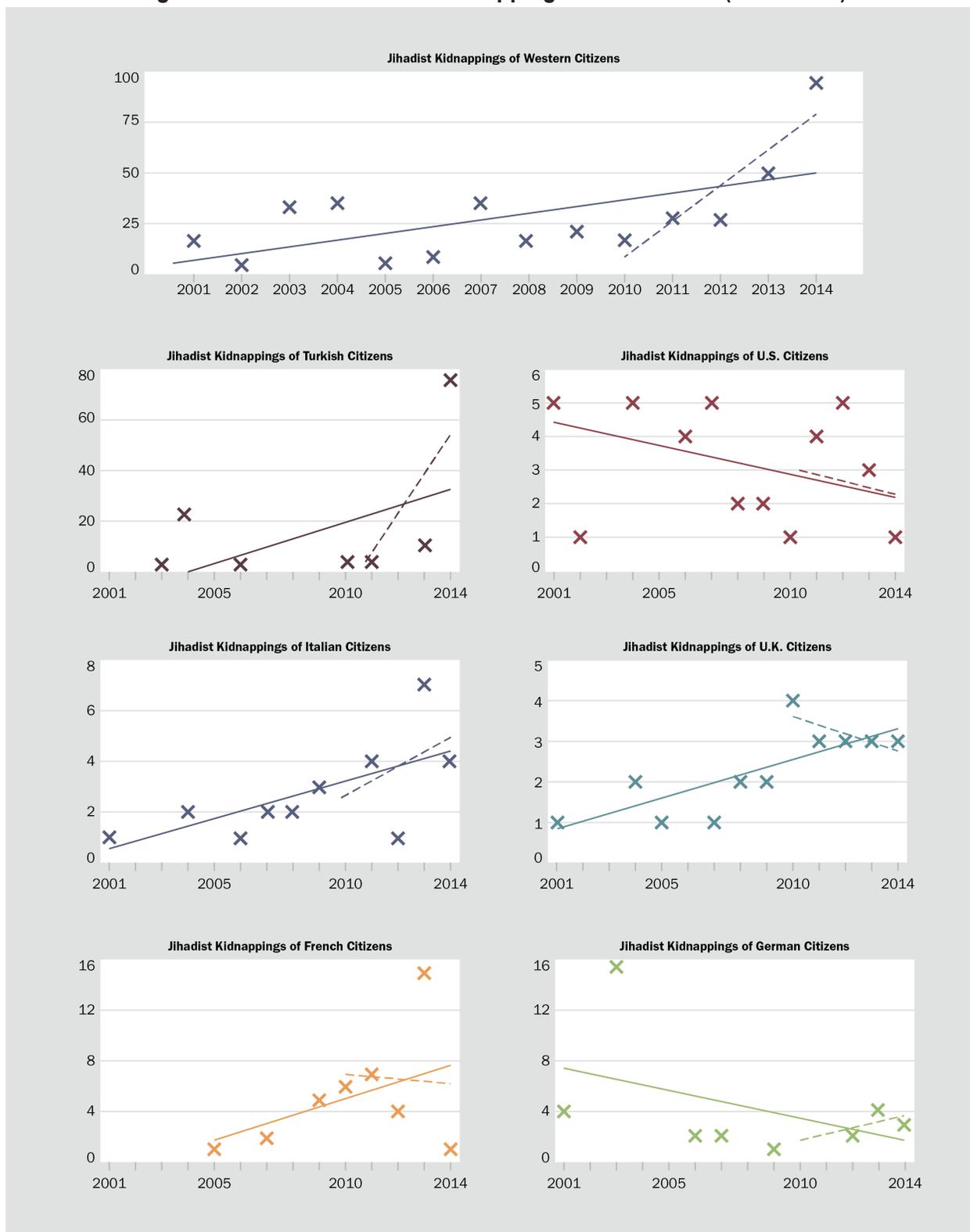
In general, the data does not provide strong support the idea of nationality-specific targeting among the larger universe of jihadist groups. While several of the top six countries have seen higher kidnapping rates during this period (Turkey, Italy, and Germany), these increases do not appear to be very different from the general trend. It is interesting, that France, a nation often criticized in the media for paying ransoms, has not seen a discernible increase in kidnappings. While it is possible that kidnappings that end in ransoms encourage terrorist groups to expand their operations more broadly, our data do not provide much support to the idea that nation-specific targeting is happening across the jihadist spectrum. What seems more likely is that the increase in jihadist kidnappings is a function of increased target availability or an expansion by jihadists of their zones of operation.

This was precisely the case in the kidnapping of Beatrice Stockly, a Swiss missionary living in Timbuktu, Mali. Stockly, who was kidnapped in April 2012, had lived in the area for several years, but was only abducted after a coalition of jihadist groups and Tuareg rebels began capturing territory in northern Mali in 2012. Her abduction was simply the by-product of that expansion of jihadist-controlled territory, rather than an organizational decision to kidnap Westerners, let alone a Westerner of a specific nationality.⁸⁰

79 See the discussion at the opening of this section on the challenges of answering questions like this directly.

80 "Mali gunmen release kidnapped Swiss woman," Reuters, 24 April 2012.

Figure 17: Trends in Jihadist Kidnappings of Westerners (2001–2014)



While the specific nationality of Western victims of jihadist kidnapping is widely regarded as the primary reason behind their abduction, an analysis of trends associated with Western abductions by non-state actors casts some doubt on this idea. In other words, it may be the case that while being a “foreigner” or “Westerner” is central to non-state actor abductions, the differences between Americans and Canadians may be irrelevant at the abduction stage.

Seven countries (Turkey, United States, Italy, United Kingdom, France, Germany, and South Korea) bear the brunt of Western citizen abductions across jihadist and all other non-state actor kidnappings. Across this group, abductions are generally consistent among most non-state actor types. While it is possible that this could indicate that these nationalities are targeted by all non-state actors, it seems more likely that individuals from these countries are more likely to be present where non-state actors are operating.

There is some regional variation in abduction rates for different nationalities. Depending on the type of non-state actor considered, some nationalities have been kidnapped more in some regions than others. Again, there are two familiar potential explanations for this. One possibility is that jihadist actors in those regions prefer to target particular nationalities. The other is that particular nationalities are more prevalent in particular regions and more likely to be abducted.

The data shows that there has been a general increase in jihadist abductions since 2001 and a sharper increase since 2010. However, there does not seem to be a correlation between nationality and an increase in abductions from 2010 to 2014 that exceeds the overall increase in jihadist abductions.

These points, individually or collectively, do not provide conclusive evidence to disprove the notion that jihadist groups are targeting specific nationalities. They do, however, add data to a discussion that has generally relied on anecdote. These points also help sketch the outlines of an alternate explanation; that jihadist abduction rates are largely a function of what Western targets are available, rather than deliberate decisions to target specific nationalities. Assuming this to be true, it does mean that nationality is not a relevant part of a hostage incident overall. In fact, as the report subsequently discusses, the specific nationality of the victim appears to impact substantially the outcome of the incident.

Does Victim Occupation Matter?

While nationality is an important factor in the discussion of kidnapping by non-state actors, other factors may play a role in determining why abductions occur. Correlation between the occupations of the victims and their relative locations may provide further insights about the abduction of Western citizens by non-state actors. In order to examine this possibility, this section will provide summary statistics on the occupations of the victims of non-state actor abductions and discuss trends over time and by region.

As discussed earlier, we break occupation down into several categories: sailor, skilled worker, NGO, tourist/student, journalist, unskilled worker, government, corporate, military, and family. We were able to assign occupations to 95% of the individuals in our dataset. We then divided the dataset into three categories: all kidnappings, kidnappings by jihadist groups, and kidnapping by all other non-state actors (Table 5).

When we sort the data, it immediately becomes clear that the threat of kidnapping, in general, is not confined to any particular occupation. Sailors, skilled workers, NGO's and tourists each contribute 15%–17% of the total number of kidnappings.⁸¹ Journalists, the fifth highest category, make up about 11% of the total abductions. The vast majority of all kidnappings (78%) are spread almost evenly across five distinct occupational backgrounds.

81 Sailors: 17.4%; Skilled Workers: 17.3%; NGO's: 17.2%; Tourists/Students: 15.7%

This broad distribution leads to a simple, but important, insight regarding the difficulty of designing policies to deal with kidnappings. Had most kidnappings involved a single type of individual, targeted policies may have helped reduce the threat. Instead, the relatively even distribution represents a significant challenge to mitigating the risk of kidnapping broadly, especially when combined with the fairly even distribution of abductions across group types and across vast geographic regions.

Table 5: Occupations of Western Victims of Non-State Actor Kidnapping⁸²

Total Kidnappings			Jihadist Kidnappings			All Other Non-State Actors		
Sailor	246	17%	NGO	96	25%	Sailor	246	24%
Skilled Worker	245	17%	Tourist/Student	62	16%	Skilled Worker	211	20%
NGO	244	17%	Government	56	14%	Tourist/Student	161	16%
Tourist/Student	223	16%	Unskilled Worker	56	14%	NGO	148	14%
Journalist	147	10%	Journalist	51	13%	Journalist	96	9%
Government	88	6%	Skilled Worker	34	9%	Corporate	58	6%
Unskilled Worker	87	6%	Corporate	15	4%	Military	36	3%
Corporate	73	5%	Military	11	3%	Government	32	3%
Military	47	3%	Family	6	2%	Unskilled Worker	31	3%
Family	18	1%	Sailor	0	0%	Family	12	1%

We turn to an examination of a subset of the overall dataset. While jihadist rates at first glance cut across many different types of occupational backgrounds, the removal from consideration of outlier events reveals a slightly different picture. For jihadist kidnappings, NGO workers are most frequently kidnapped (25%), followed by roughly similar numbers of tourists (16%), government (14%), unskilled workers (14%) and journalists (13%). If, however, the 77 Turkish truck drivers and government employees kidnapped in 2014 and the 32 European tourists kidnapped in Algeria in 2003 are removed from the data, all three occupational categories drop: Tourists to 30 (11%), Unskilled Workers to 25 (9%), and Government to 10 (4%). When adjusted, the top two categories NGO (34.5%), and Journalists (18%) make up the majority of the occupations of victims of jihadist kidnapping (53%). While the removal of outliers narrows the field slightly, the relatively even distribution of jihadist kidnappings across occupational backgrounds remains surprising and requires further analysis to identify vulnerable populations.

Sorting jihadist kidnapping over time reveals peaks in abductions of particular occupational backgrounds (Figure 18). The four most distinctive spikes (2003, 2007, and two in 2014) can all be explained by particular incidents with many victims.⁸³ The spikes that remain after removing these outliers, however, indicate an increased vulnerability of individuals with particular occupational backgrounds due to changes in local conditions.

The 2013 increase in jihadist kidnappings of journalists is a prime example of occupational vulnerability due to changes in local conditions, in this case an ongoing armed conflict. At first look, it is tempting to say that the primary trend for journalist abductions is regional, as most of the total (64%) and jihadist (65%) abductions of journalists from 2001 to 2015 have taken place in the Middle East (Figure 19 and Figure 20). Digging into the data a bit more deeply reveals, however, that the majority (70%) of jihadist abductions in the Middle East have taken place in Syria between 2012 and 2015,

82 The numbers in this section will not equal the total number of 1,485 cases represented in the dataset, as the victim's occupation was identifiable in 95% (1,418) of the cases. Also, the percentages in Table 5 do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

83 In 2003, 32 European tourists were kidnapped in Algeria by members of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). The peak in NGO kidnappings in 2007 is largely a function of the abduction of 23 South Korean missionaries in Afghanistan. Similarly, the two spikes in 2014 can be traced to the 77 previously mentioned Turkish truck drivers and government workers.

during its chaotic civil war. Syria, of course, is not the only country to face internal strife; there was a high level of internal strife in Iraq after the 2003 invasion of U.S. forces. Interestingly, however, relatively few journalists were kidnapped by jihadist groups in Iraq from 2003–2011.⁸⁴

It is worth examining the abductions of Western journalists to place these findings in perspective. While a similar percentage of kidnappings of journalists (64%) by other militant or unknown groups take place in the Middle East, abductions by those groups took place more often in Iraq from 2004–2008 (46%) than in Syria and Iraq from 2012–2015 (26%). In other words, although fewer kidnappings by jihadist actors took place in the Iraq War and subsequent insurgency, there were more kidnappings by militant or unknown groups (Table 6). Despite this difference, the overall number of kidnappings of journalists was greater in Syria (2012–2015) than in Iraq (2003–2011).

Table 6: Western Journalist Kidnappings in Iraq and Syria

Group Type	Iraq (2003-2008)	Syria (2012–2015)
Jihadist	4	23
Other Militant Groups	4	7
Unknown	25	10

This examination highlights the importance of having detailed data in order to tease out nuance. It appears that the impact of conflict on the kidnapping of journalists depends on the actors in the conflict, with journalists in Syria potentially more likely to come into contact with jihadists, who both likely represent a larger proportion of the combatants in Syria and control more territory than at any time during the Iraqi conflict. On the other hand, journalists in Iraq (2003–2011) often operated with or in close proximity to the tens of thousands of U.S. and coalition troops operating in the region. When looked at in this light, it is likely that in 2013, journalists were unprepared to enter the environment that put them in close proximity with jihadist groups operating in Syria and, having entered Syria, subsequently were far from friendly forces that could protect or help them, as was the case in Iraq. However, as mentioned earlier, overall kidnapping trends appear to have decreased in Syria in the early 2015. This trend holds for journalists as well. It may be that after many journalists were abducted and publically executed near the beginning of the conflict and awareness of the threat spread, fewer journalists traveled to the region, resulting in a much lower abduction rate for journalists.⁸⁵

The final spike (Figure 18) is that of unskilled workers in 2004, which displays similar dynamics. The vast majority of total (82%) and jihadist (98%) abductions of workers involved in low-skilled occupations such as construction or truck driving have occurred in the Middle East. Of this number, virtually all have occurred in Iraq.⁸⁶ All of the 2004 incidents took place in Iraq as Tawid wal-Jihad, the organization that came before al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI), embarked on an kidnapping spree.

84 Four Western journalists were kidnapped in Iraq by jihadist groups between 2003 and 2011; two in 2004, one in 2005, and one in 2006. Combined they account for 8% of Western journalist abductions by Sunni jihadist groups and 12% of those conducted in the Middle East.

85 From January 2014 to July 2015, there were only five cases where journalists were abducted; three by Sunni jihadist organizations and two by unknown groups.

86 Within the CTC Hostage Dataset, 96% of the total abductions of unskilled workers within the Middle East took place in Iraq, while all of the 55 cases conducted by Sunni jihadists occurred in Iraq.

Figure 18: Westerners Kidnapped by Non-State Actors, by Occupation (2001–2014)

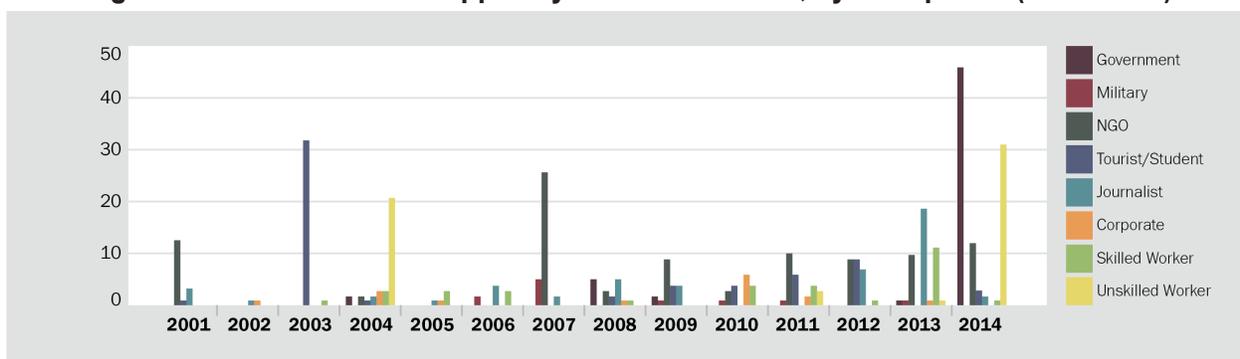


Figure 19: Westerners Kidnapped by Non-State Actors, by Occupation and Region

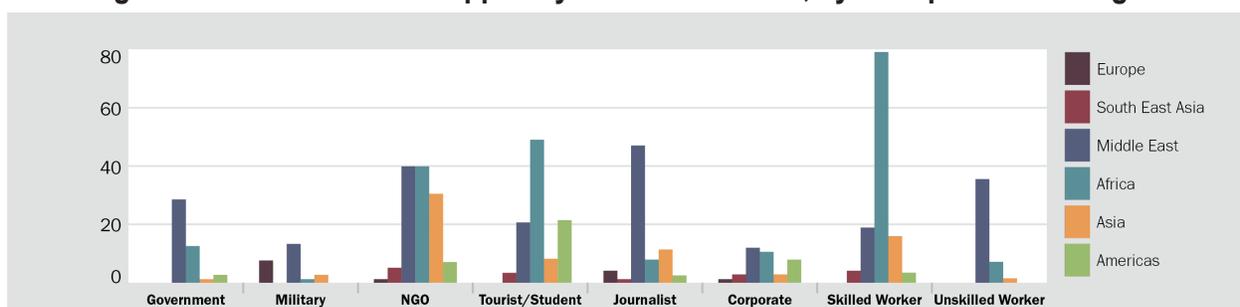
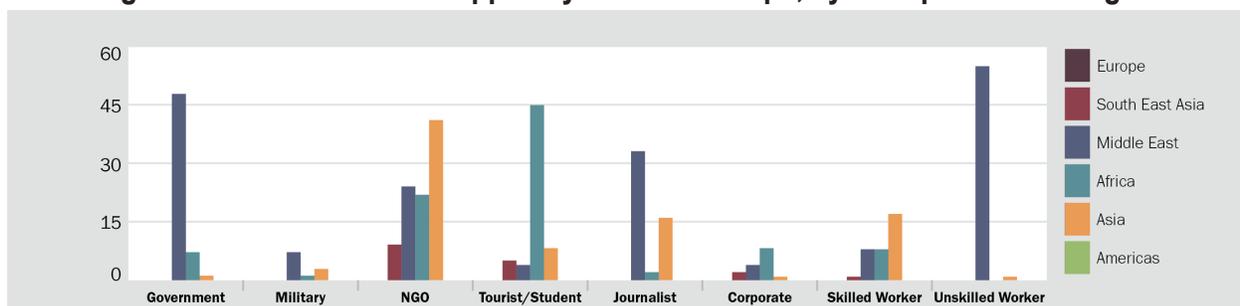


Figure 20: Westerners Kidnapped by Jihadist Groups, by Occupation and Region



The role that active conflicts play in the abductions of journalists and unskilled workers drives a larger question about the interplay between occupations and conflict regions. Since 2001, there has been almost constant conflict between jihadist groups, local governments, and Western governments in some part of the world, whether in the Afghanistan / Pakistan region, Iraq or Syria.

The prominence of the Middle East in regional discussions of kidnapping and the number of abductions that have taken place in Iraq (Table 3) suggest that these conflicts play an important role in kidnappings broadly and jihadist abductions in particular. When examining occupation, these conflicts play a critical role for jihadist kidnappings and further reinforce some aspects of the idea that the presence of target populations drives abduction rates, as opposed to terrorist groups picking and choosing victims based on their occupation.

Table 7: Occupations of Western Victims of Jihadist Kidnapping in Conflict Zones⁸⁷

	Jihadist Rates	
	Conflict Zone	Non-Conflict Zone
Unskilled Worker	100%	0%
Military	91%	9%
Government	88%	13%
Journalist	84%	16%
Skilled Worker	68%	32%
NGO	51%	49%
Corporate	33%	67%
Tourist / Student	15%	85%

Not surprisingly, conflict zones like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Syria, where jihadist groups are active combatants, account for most abductions by jihadists, almost regardless of occupation type (Table 7). While this finding is perhaps simple and intuitive, it underscores the need for all types of organizations and companies that send individuals to conflict regions to prepare their employees for the eventuality of abduction.⁸⁸

Journalists and NGO workers, the two occupations that account for most jihadist abductions, show two contradictory trends. Jihadist abductions of journalists overwhelmingly take place in conflict regions. Aid workers, on the other hand, are just as likely have been to be kidnapped outside Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan or Pakistan. As can be seen from a regional examination of occupational trends, NGO abductions are more evenly spread across regions than any other occupation. The evenness of NGO abductions by jihadist groups in and out of conflict zones, combined with the fact that they represent roughly a third⁸⁹ of Western victims of jihadist kidnappings, indicates that the nature of the work that aid workers conduct is more likely to place them into contact with jihadist groups, and thus more likely to be abducted by them.

While the links between kidnapping rates and the nationalities of the Western victims did not seem to be have a causal relationship, it is possible that the occupation of the victims, which roughly indicates why they are in theater, is a more central driver of abduction rates. That being said, the majority of total non-state actor kidnappings (78%) fall fairly evenly across five distinct occupations. Jihadist abductions appear to be slightly more narrowly distributed with a small majority (53%) of Western victims coming from two occupational categories; NGOs (35%) and journalists (18%).⁹⁰ Conflict zones also play an important role relating to occupation, with the majority of six of eight occupational category abductions taking place in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria or Pakistan from 2001 to 2015 (Table 7).

These findings seem to support the theory that the abduction of Westerners by jihadist groups is largely a function of the availability of a particular type of Western victim. Roughly one-third of jihadist victims are aid workers, missionaries, and teachers working for NGOs. Their work largely takes place in unstable regions where jihadist actors may have space to operate. Most other victims are kidnapped in conflict regions where jihadist groups operate. Businessmen and tourists, individuals unlikely to

87 For the time period 2001–2015, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan are considered conflict zones.

88 It is beyond the scope of this paper, but this preparation should go beyond tactical lessons of how to survive the abduction and captivity. It might include next of kin notification, financial preparation, contingent powers of attorney, and specific instructions for things such as access to e-mail and social media accounts.

89 Twenty six percent of the gross victims of Sunni jihadist abductions were coded as NGOs. With the removal of outliers, this number climbs to 34.5%. See Table 5 and corresponding discussion.

90 This is only the case if kidnapping events where more than 30 individuals were kidnapped at the same time are removed; for gross numbers see Table 5.

be in such unstable regions, make up a much smaller portion of jihadist victims. Thus, it is likely that proximity to jihadist groups (as represented by occupation type) represents the primary driver of jihadist abduction rates, rather than the deliberate targeting of specific occupation.

Which Jihadist Groups are Most Active?

A total of 36 jihadist groups have abducted or held Western victims between 2001 and mid-2015. Despite the broad number of groups that have employed the tactic, a majority of these groups (19 groups; 52%) have used the tactic only once or twice. Three groups (the Islamic State, the Taliban, and AQIM⁹¹) are responsible for 69% of all individuals abducted (Table 8).⁹² Other jihadist groups, despite their operational activity and notoriety in other areas, have kidnapped or held Westerners less frequently. Despite the publicity achieved by some groups through the use of kidnapping, it is not a tactic that is used frequently by a greater number of jihadist groups.

Table 8: Ten Highest Ranking Jihadist Groups Responsible for Western Kidnappings

Group Responsible for Captivity	Individuals Abducted	Percentage of Total Abductions
Islamic State / AQI	128	32%
Taliban	82	21%
AQIM / GSPC	64	16%
Abu Sayyaf Group	14	4%
AQAP	12	3%
Boko Haram	12	3%
Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Fundamentalists Brigades	11	3%
Jabhat Al Nusra	10	3%
al-Shabaab	8	2%
Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)	7	2%

It is important to note that while the cases attributed to each group in the table above illustrate cases where each jihadist group held and ultimately determined the fates of Western hostages, the terrorist groups themselves were not always directly responsible for the actual abductions. During the research for this project, multiple cases were identified where little-known militant and criminal groups abducted the victims, yet these groups gave or sold their captives to jihadist groups ultimately responsible for their disposition. While it is certain in these cases that a transfer was made, it is difficult to determine if these “proxy kidnapers” were operating opportunistically of their own volition or at the direction / suggestion of the jihadist groups to whom they provided hostages. There is evidence to support both possibilities.

In some instances, transfers between proxy kidnapers and jihadist groups appear to have been done without direction by the jihadist groups that ultimately held them. In July 2009, for instance, Denis Alex and Marc Aubriere, both French intelligence officers operating in Somalia, were kidnapped from their hotel room by unknown assailants impersonating police officers. According to available reporting, when the kidnapers’ truck broke down during the exfiltration, they were surrounded by Hizbul

91 This analysis combined precursor organizations that underwent name changes when determining the rates for the Islamic State and AQIM. AQIM’s rates include data from the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). Similarly, the Islamic State’s rates include the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, the Islamic State of Iraq, the Mujahedeen Shura Council, al-Qa`ida in Iraq, and Tawhid wal-Jihad.

92 All three groups have conducted specific kidnappings with a high number of victims. If these events are removed, their numbers and ranking shift slightly, but the trend is unaffected. The ranking becomes 1) Taliban: 59 (22%) 2) Islamic State / AQI: 51 (19%) and 3) AQIM / GSPC: 32 (12%). Together they still account for 53% of individuals abducted.

Islam fighters who took control of the captives.⁹³ Al-Shabaab was alerted to the abduction as well and was able to obtain Alex as a captive. Thus, Hizbul Islam and al-Shabaab, who each ultimately held each of the captives, were neither involved in, nor responsible for, the actual abduction.

In other cases, while the abductions were clearly not conducted by jihadist groups, the level of direction is less clear. Consider the example of the November 2009 abduction of three Spanish aid workers in Mauritania.⁹⁴ While the victims were ultimately held by AQIM, they were reportedly abducted by a group of kidnapers led by Omar Sid'Ahmed Ould Hamma.⁹⁵ Hamma, who claimed to have no affiliation with AQIM, sold the Spaniards to the group after abducting them.⁹⁶ After Hamma was arrested in Mauritania in February 2010, his release became part of the deal negotiated by AQIM for the release of the three hostages.⁹⁷ While it is clear that AQIM operatives did not conduct this abduction, it is unclear if the organization directed it specifically or if Hamma was simply aware AQIM was likely to purchase Western hostages. But, whatever the operational relationship was between AQIM and Hamma, the organization valued his services enough to orchestrate his release.

Currently, reporting has been found indicating that proxy kidnapers transferred or sold only 5% of the 399 Western victims held by jihadist groups within the CTC's dataset. It is likely that this number is in reality higher based on the difficulty associated with obtaining details about the abduction phase of kidnappings.⁹⁸ The phenomenon of proxy kidnappings adds an additional layer of complexity for governments when crafting preventive policies and considering responses to active incidents.

Who Holds Captives the Longest?⁹⁹

The examination of captivity reveals that jihadist groups tend to hold their Western captives, on average, longer than any other group type (Figure 21).¹⁰⁰ Jihadist groups have held more Western captives for over a year (9%) than all other non-state actors (3%).¹⁰¹ Notwithstanding this extended period, most jihadist kidnapping incidents (30%) are resolved between three and six months after the abduction (Figure 22). Sizable proportions of jihadist abductions are also resolved between two weeks and one month (18%), and between one and three months (17%). When taken together, this information shows that while jihadist groups tend to hold captives *longer* than other non-state actors, only 18% of their abductions exceed six months, and that 65.5% of their abductions are resolved between two weeks and six months. While jihadist kidnappings tend to last longer than those of other groups, there are some similarities between jihadist and pirate groups when it comes to the length of captivity.

While most other non-state actors resolve the majority of their kidnappings within a month of the abduction, kidnappings by pirate groups are the exception and tend to track more closely with jihad-

93 Matthew Campbell, "French agent Marc Aubriere's amazing barefoot escape through Mogadishu," *Australian*, 31 August 2009.

94 "Spain fears Mauritania kidnap was al-Qaeda," BBC News, 30 November 2009.

95 "Mauritania jails Qaeda mercenary kidnapper," Al Arabiya News, 17 October 2010.

96 In an interview with Agence France Presse, Hamma stated "I have nothing to do with Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb. Me, I do business, and if you sell something to someone who is from AQIM, it does not mean that you are from AQIM. I am a businessman." "Kidnapper of Spanish hostages says it was just business," Agence France Presse, 24 August 2010.

97 "Suicide bomber's attack on Mauritanian barracks foiled," *National*, 25 August 2010.

98 For instance, when describing how terrorist organizations go about kidnapping, one journalist who has done extensive research on the subject claimed that terrorist groups, having been forced in some cases from population centers, have "outsourced" kidnapping to other types (criminal or tribal) groups. "Kidnapping Is A Lucrative Business For Al-Qaida, Documents Show," NPR, 31 July 2014.

99 This section includes only cases whose resolutions are known; of the 399 cases of Sunni jihadist abductions of Western citizens, four (1%) are considered still captive (i.e., proof of life was provided within a year of this writing) while 15 cases (4%) have either completely unknown outcomes or are suspected as still being held, but have not had proof of life in the past year.

100 While pirate groups hold a slightly greater percentage of Western hostages for one month or longer (70% pirate groups compared to 66% Sunni jihadist groups), a significant number of their abductions are resolved between one and three months.

101 Individual rates of captivities exceeding a year by group type are: Sunni jihadist 9%; other militant groups 3%; tribal groups 1%, pirate groups 5%; unknown groups 3%.

ist captivity durations (Figure 23). Much like jihadist captivities, the majority (63%) of abductions by pirate groups are resolved between two weeks and six months. Of those, however, most (46%) are resolved between one and three months, as opposed to a three-to-six month resolution period, which is more common for jihadist captivities. Captivities exceeding six months also occur at roughly the same rates (18% jihadist; 14% pirate). Here again, pirate captivities are shorter; with 4% of captivities lasting between one and two years (6% jihadist) and no captivities exceeding three years (3% jihadist).

Figure 21: Duration of Westerner Captivities by Non-State Actors, by Group Type

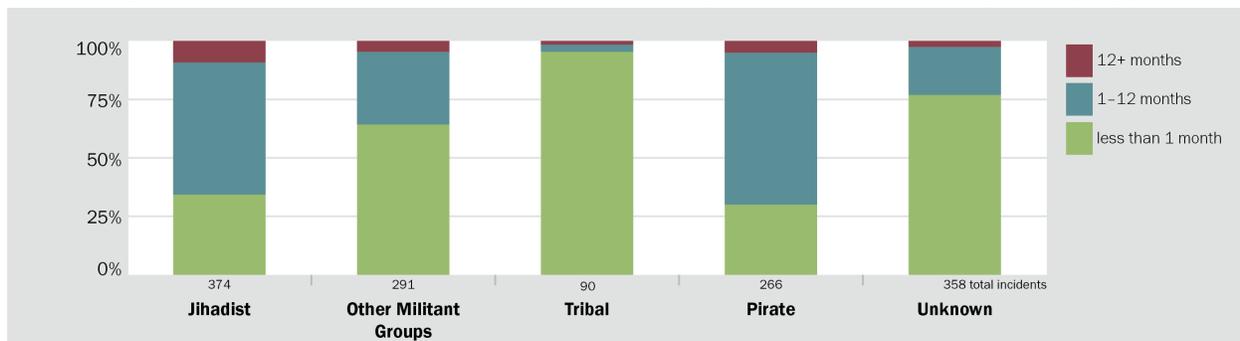


Figure 22: Duration of Westerner Captivities by Jihadist Groups

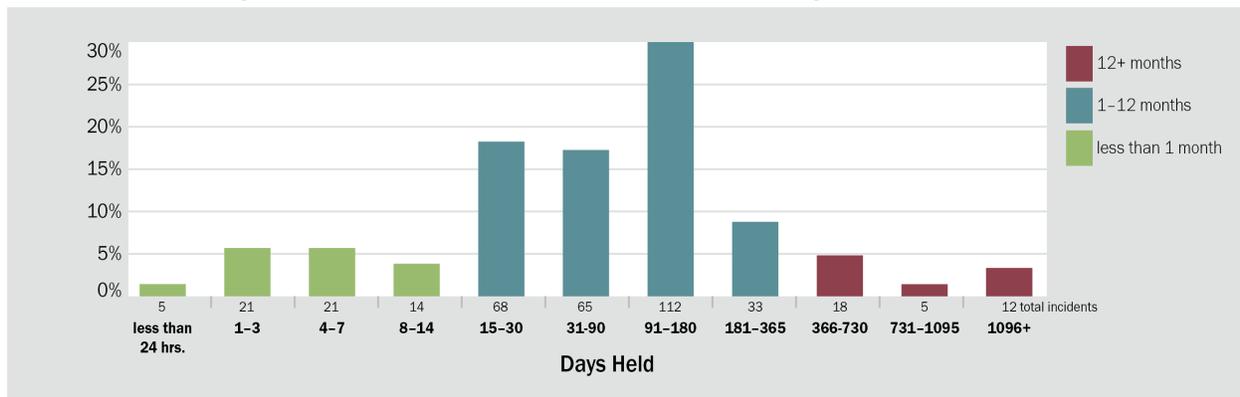
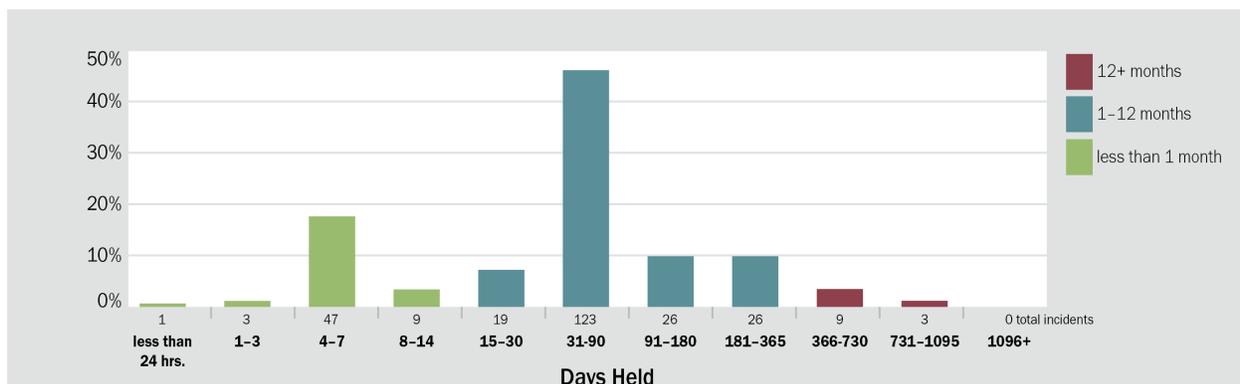


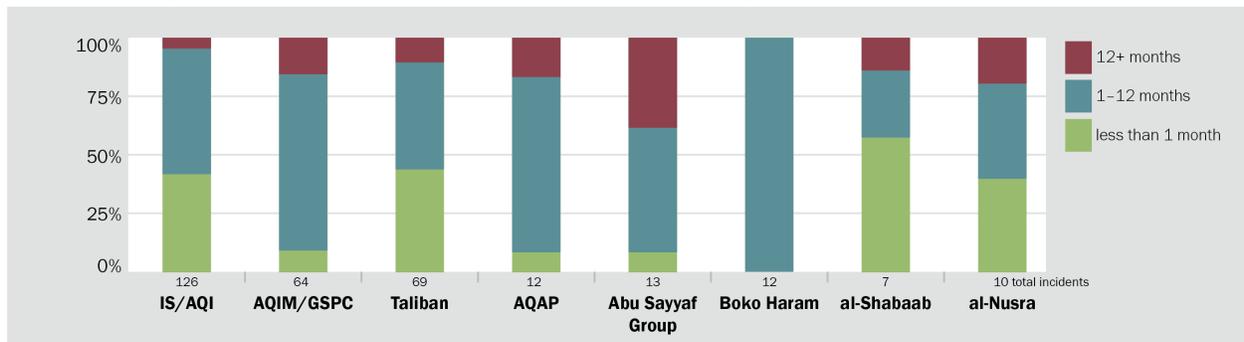
Figure 23: Duration of Westerner Captivities by Pirate Groups



While it is arguable that jihadist and pirate abductions are different in many substantial ways, the similarities (and differences) between the durations of captivities are interesting. Pirate organizations clearly see Western captives as mostly financial commodities and it is possible that the similarities between the lengths of captivity indicate that jihadist groups, broadly, view Western captives in the same way. It is also possible that the slight differences in duration indicate the increased challenge of negotiating with jihadist groups, which are often labeled as terrorist organizations.

It is important to note that the duration of Western victim captivities are not uniform across the landscape of jihadist organizations. An examination of duration by individual groups highlights the substantial differences between groups (Figure 24). For example, while the Abu Sayyaf Group has the highest percentage of abductions lasting for longer than a year (38%), AQIM has held the most Westerners for that time period (ten individuals). Of those incidents lasting more than one year, only one of Abu Sayyaf Group’s captivities have exceeded three years, while AQIM has held eight individuals captive for that long. At the other end of the spectrum, al-Shabaab, the Islamic State (including precursor organizations), and the Taliban have the greatest tendency to resolve Western abductions within the first month. Of these groups, the Islamic State and the Taliban have done so with the most frequency with 52 and 30 individual cases being resolved within a month of the abduction, respectively.

Figure 24: Duration of Westerner Captivities by Individual Jihadist Groups



Examining the duration of jihadist abductions of Western citizens can provide some potential insights into the phenomenon broadly, but it also highlights that the dynamics of these incidents differ by group. This, in turn, emphasizes the importance of having previously developed expertise about individual groups, especially when crafting a response to abductions.

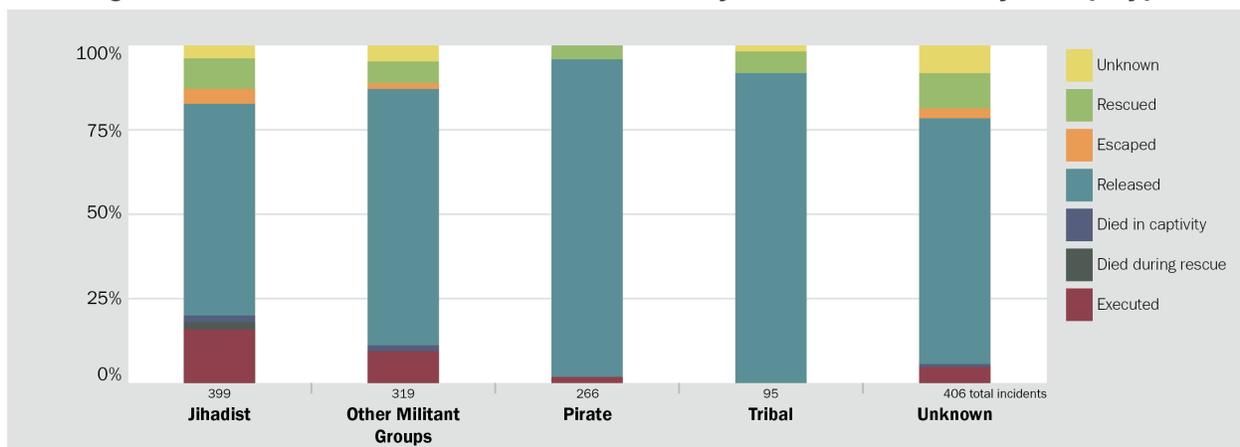
Who Executes and Who Releases?

Perhaps the most critical question in kidnappings is the fate of the victims. The fact that the outcome of the incident is presumably undetermined at the beginning of the event is an important element in kidnappings, giving them great emotional and psychological influence. In these complex and uncertain situations, it is often difficult for policymakers and practitioners to make sound and informed decisions. This section endeavors to provide some statistical data regarding the outcomes of jihadist abductions of Westerners as a starting point from which practitioners, policymakers, and academics can better understand these incidents. This section first looks at the differences in outcomes across non-state actor group types and individual jihadist groups. It will also provide data and analysis on the interaction between nationality and the outcomes of kidnapping events. Finally, this section closes by discussing relationships between duration and outcomes to better inform those charged with responding to jihadist abductions.

Examining the outcomes of kidnapping events involving Western victims by non-state actor group types reveals stark differences and some surprising similarities (Figure 25). Not surprisingly, jihadist groups are more likely to execute their hostages than any other non-state actor. The jihadist execution

rate (15%) is three times that of all other non-state actors combined (5%), almost twice that of other armed groups (9%), and almost four times the execution rate of unknown groups (4%).

Figure 25: Outcomes of Westerner Abductions by Non-State Actors, by Group Type



In addition to having a higher rate of execution, Western victims of jihadist groups are both more likely to die during captivity from causes other than execution¹⁰² and to be killed during the course of a rescue attempt.¹⁰³ The higher number of deaths during rescue attempts may simply be the result of the complexity of rescue operations for victims of jihadist kidnappings. Mortality rates for the rescue attempts by group type, however, indicate that jihadist groups may be more inclined to kill their captives when rescues are imminent (Table 9). Based on the data, rescue attempts for captives held by jihadist groups resulted in the death of captives 19% of the time, almost four times more than the average rate for all other group types (5%).¹⁰⁴

Table 9: Mortality Rates of Rescue Attempts of Westerners

	Jihadist		All Other Group Types	
	Total Number	Percentage	Total Number	Percentage
Victim Rescued	34	81%	82	95%
Victim Died During Rescue	8	19%	4	5%
Total	42	100%	86	100%

While the high number of deaths associated with jihadist kidnappings may be expected, the relatively high rate of release (63%) was unexpected. While it is below both the total rate for all other non-state actors (80%) and each non-state actor category,¹⁰⁵ the fact that the majority of the victims of jihadist kidnappings are released is surprising and raises interesting questions addressed in more depth later.

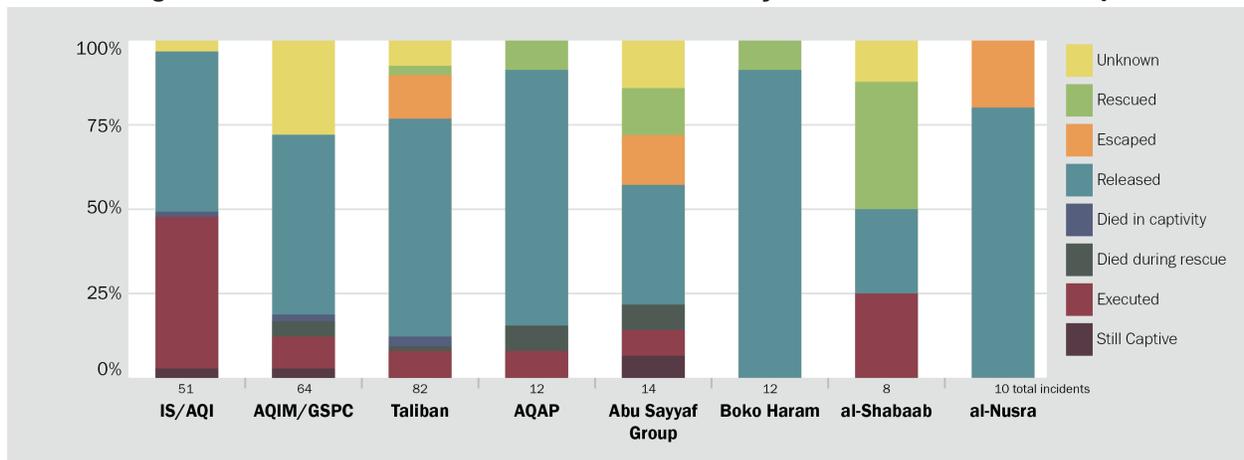
102 Deaths during captivity among Westerners, aside from executions, have primarily been due to military action targeting the groups or due to illness or an untreated medical condition. Six Westerners have died during jihadist captivity.

103 Eight Westerners have been killed during the course of rescue from jihadist groups.

104 It is important to note that this finding relies on a relatively small sample size and is subject to further refinement with additional data (Table 9).

105 Unknown groups have the second-lowest release rate (72%), while the group type expected to be closest in activity to Sunni jihadist groups, other militant groups, have a release rate of 76%. Pirate and tribal groups almost exclusively release their victims and have rates of 93% and 92% respectively.

Figure 26: Outcomes of Westerner Abductions by Individual Jihadist Groups



As shown in the discussion of duration, the overarching trends in jihadist activity are not necessarily reflected in detailed examinations of individual jihadist groups. This is also the case when it comes to the outcomes of kidnapping incidents when broken down by individual groups (Figure 26). Some organizations have relatively low execution rates. For example, execution rates are relatively even (between 7% and 9%) among AQIM, the Taliban, AQAP, and ASG, with the latter two organizations only conducting a single execution each. Potentially even more surprising, our dataset has no record of Boko Haram and Jabhat al-Nusra having ever executed a Western hostage. Adjusting for outlying incidents, the Islamic State and its precursor organizations have the highest execution rate (45%).¹⁰⁶ Al-Shabaab has the second-highest execution rate (25%), although the low number of Western captives it has had makes this finding somewhat less significant (Table 10).

Focusing on the Islamic State, it is interesting that release and execution rates vary between the Islamic State and its precursors. While the Islamic State of Iraq, the Mujahideen Shura Council, al-Qa`ida in Iraq, and Tawhid wal-Jihad have a combined execution rate of 64%, Islamic State has a comparatively low execution rate of 27%. This finding may indicate that the organization has either shifted its motivations for kidnapping Westerners or its preferences related to the outcomes of the abductions. It is worth noting, however, that seven (44%) of the individuals executed by the Islamic State’s precursor organizations were members of the U.S. military. It is unlikely that Islamic State would release a Western service member captured today. This suggests that the change in execution rates over time may be more a function of the characteristics of its victims rather than organizational preferences.

Turning to release rates, al-Shabaab has the lowest such rate (25%) of any jihadist organizations (Table 10). Despite its low execution rate (7%), Abu Sayyaf Group has the second-lowest release rate, owing primarily to a higher combined percentage rate of rescue, escape, and ambiguity of outcome. While the Islamic State’s release rate is 47% overall, it changes if we separate out its precursor organizations. When we do this, the Islamic State’s current rate is 58%,¹⁰⁷ while that of its precursors is 36%. The rest of the organizations considered have release rates of more than 50%. Boko Haram and Jabhat al-Nusra’s Western victims have all survived, either through release, rescue, or escape.

106 The outlying incidents are the release of 77 Turkish citizens and the two discussed earlier. With the 77 Turkish citizens included, the Islamic State (including precursor organizations) has an execution rate of 18%, which places it behind al-Shabaab, but still leaves it responsible for the majority of Western victim executions.

107 When the 77 Turkish citizens are included, the Islamic State’s combined rate is 79%, while its standalone rate is 89%.

Table 10: Western Hostage Execution and Release Rates, by Individual Jihadist Group¹⁰⁸

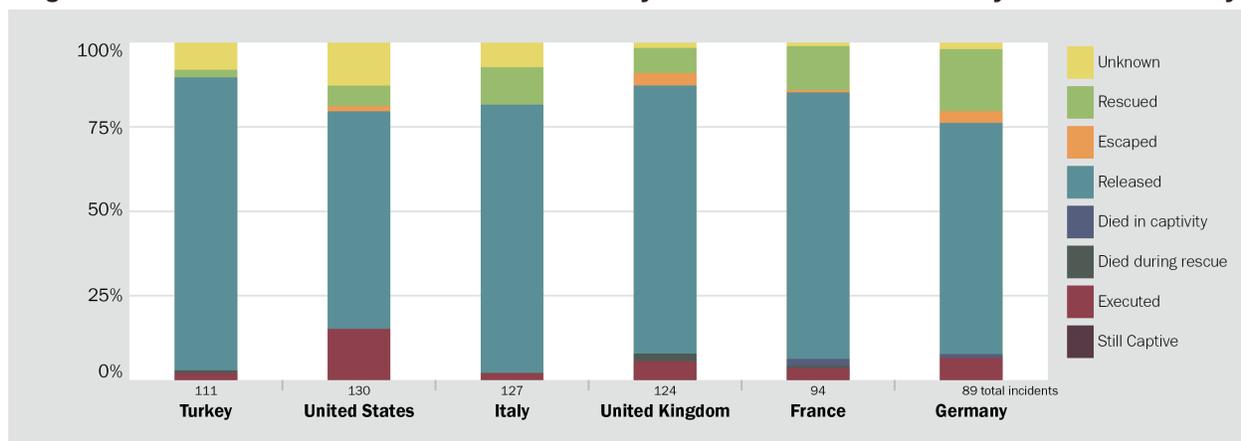
Jihadist Group	Execution Rate	Jihadist Group	Release Rate
Islamic State / AQI	45%	al-Shabaab	25%
al-Shabaab	25%	Abu Sayyaf Group	36%
Taliban	9%	Islamic State / AQI	47%
AQIM / GSPC	9%	AQIM / GSPC	53%
AQAP	8%	Taliban	65%
Abu Sayyaf Group	7%	AQAP	75%
Boko Haram	0%	Jabhat al-Nusra	80%
Jabhat al-Nusra	0%	Boko Haram	92%

The potential implications of examining release rates by jihadist groups are interesting. Other non-state actors with high release rates, specifically pirate and tribal groups, are reported to have done so after negotiations often ending with a ransom payment or some other concession (tribal groups often require the release of a family member from prison). Since the data on ransom payments to terrorist organizations is largely unreliable, no great effort was made to collect indications of payments for this dataset. News reporting, U.S. government statements, and internal letters and external statements of terrorist groups nonetheless all indicate that ransoms are being paid to jihadist groups, making it likely that at least some part of our dataset have involved ransoms or other concessions to jihadist groups.

During the analysis in the first section of this report, nationality did not seem to have a prominent role in explaining abductions by jihadist groups or non-state actors more broadly. While it is conceivable that kidnappers may not know the nationality of a victim prior to the abduction, it seems logical they would become aware of it during the course of the captivity. Therefore, this section revisits nationality to examine its influence on the outcome of the kidnapping.

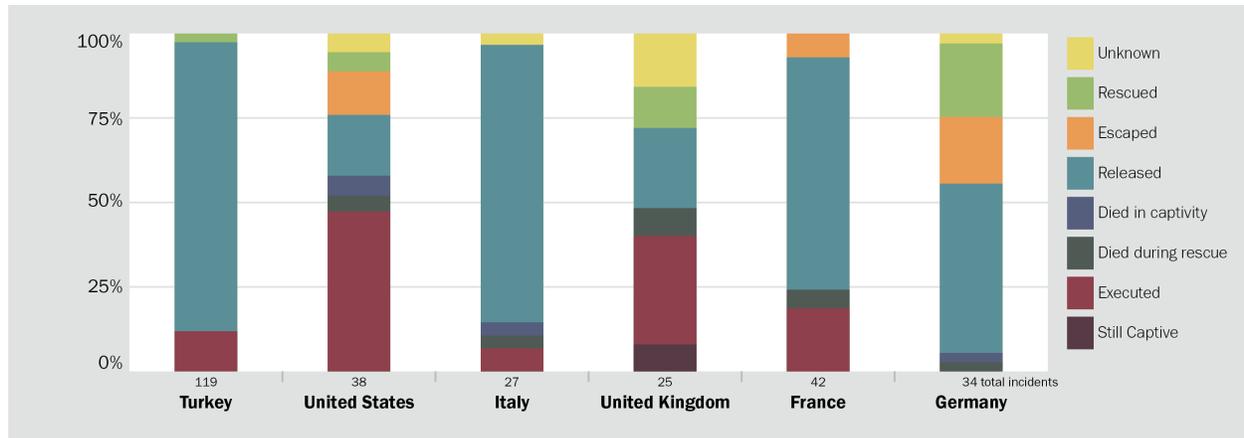
An examination of the outcomes of all non-state actors, excluding jihadists, by the top six nationalities indicates that nationality has an impact on execution rates, with U.S. citizens being most likely to be executed (Figure 27). With an execution rate of 15%, U.S. citizens are five times more likely to be executed by non-state actor group types other than jihadists than the citizens of all other countries, which have a combined execution rate of 3%. Germany and the United Kingdom have the next highest rates of execution (7% and 6% respectively). France (3%), Italy (3%), and Turkey (2%) all have comparably low execution rates when kidnapped by all other non-state actors.

Figure 27: Outcomes of Westerner Abductions by Other Non-State Actors, by Select Nationality



108 Does not include the 77 Turkish citizens kidnapped in 2014.

Figure 28: Outcomes of Westerner Abductions by Jihadist Groups, by Select Nationality



When only jihadist abductions and outcomes are considered, the data shows that, while almost all countries have increased rates of execution, the rates for the United States and the UK jump significantly (Figure 28). While the absolute number of Americans executed stays roughly the same when jihadist abductions are considered,¹⁰⁹ the rate jumps from roughly a sixth (15%) in the case of other non-state groups to almost half (47%) in the case of jihadist abductions. This is four times the rate of other nationalities, which have a combined execution rate of 12%. Execution rates for UK citizens also increase dramatically from 6% (other non-state actors) to 32% (jihadist groups).

As noticeable as the relationship between nationality and execution rates is, the correlation between release rates and nationality is perhaps equally remarkable. Turkey and Italy have rates of release that dramatically exceed the average release rate of jihadist groups (85% and 81%, respectively, compared to 63%) while their execution rates (13% and 7%) are well below the average execution rate of 15% for jihadist groups. French release rates (69%) also track above the jihadist average, although they have an execution rate just above the jihadist average. Even though the German release rate (50%) does not exceed the jihadist average, they have had no citizens executed by jihadist groups in our dataset. The U.S. and UK release rates (18% and 24%) are drastically below the jihadist average; in fact, U.S. citizens are almost four times less likely to be released when the combined release rate of all other nations is considered (68%).

The fact that U.S. citizens are four times more likely to be executed and at least four times less likely to be released than individuals from other nations is an important finding. Additional findings of similar rates of execution and release for the United Kingdom, reversed trends for Turkey and Italy, and comparatively high release rates for France and Germany make the finding regarding U.S. citizens even more striking. It is possible that the perception among jihadist groups of the United States as a global superpower supporting “apostate” regimes within the Middle East and North Africa plays a role in the high execution and low release rates of its citizens. France, however, has a similar reputation among jihadist groups, yet its citizens experience significantly higher rates of release.¹¹⁰ It should be noted, however, that despite denials from their governments, many European countries have been

109 Abductions of U.S. citizens by Sunni jihadists 38; Executions of U.S. citizens by Sunni jihadists 18; Abductions of U.S. citizens by all other groups 128; Executions of U.S. citizens by all other groups 19.

110 Al-Qa`ida’s core leadership and AQIM have both specifically mentioned France as a target for attacks, with AQIM’s leader Abdelmalek Droukdel identifying the country as its principal enemy. Pascale Combelles Siegel, “AQIM Renews its Threats Against France,” The Jamestown Foundation, 7 August 2007. Lianne Kennedy Boudali, “The GSPC: Newest Franchise in Al-Qa`ida’s Global Jihad,” Combating Terrorism Center, 2 April 2007.

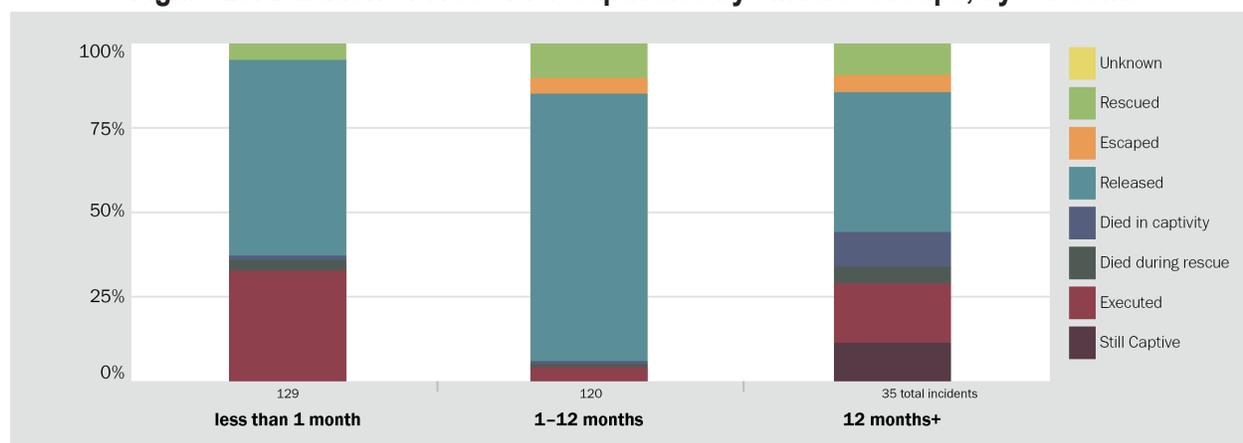
identified in multiple open-source news articles as paying ransoms to jihadist groups.¹¹¹ If true, this would provide a plausible explanation for their high release rates relative to the U.S. and UK, which, according to public statements and open-source reporting, do not pay ransoms.

This examination highlights perfectly the challenge of resolving jihadist kidnapping incidents. It appears, based on U.S. and UK rates, that nations who refuse to negotiate with jihadist organizations have a higher risk of their citizens being executed. It is also clear from numerous government releases and an examination of primary source materials produced by jihadist groups that ransom payments received by these groups fund their operations.¹¹² Neither of these outcomes is preferable for policy-makers.

It is also clear from looking at the data that hostage rescues are both incredibly difficult and risky. As seen earlier in this section (Table 9), rescue attempts for victims of jihadist kidnappings end in the death of the hostage a non-trivial amount of the time (19%). The complexity of these rescue attempts, as well as the potential difficulty of infiltrating rescue forces into some of these areas, help explain in part the low rates of Western hostage rescues. If a government lacks effective hostage-rescue capabilities and actionable intelligence, policymakers are left without good options as they contemplate what to do after one of their citizens has been abducted by a jihadist group.

Looking at the broad trends in jihadist abductions of Western victims provides some insights about the lifespan of an abduction. Figure 29 illustrates the outcome of the kidnapping incidents categorized by the duration of the incident.¹¹³ The timeline shows the potentially chaotic nature of the first 30 days of a kidnapping event, during which time a captive will be abducted, evacuated, and likely moved multiple times before arriving at a safe house or detention center. Of the cases resolved in the first month, 33% ended with an execution, the highest execution rate for any time period. Of the cases that end in execution, 73% happen in the first month (Figure 30). Over half (58%) of cases in this timeframe end in release, while only a small number (5%) of victims are rescued in the first 30 days. To be clear, most of the rescues carried out within the first month are conducted by local security forces who have been alerted to the abduction.

Figure 29: Duration of Westerner Captivities by Jihadist Groups, by Outcome



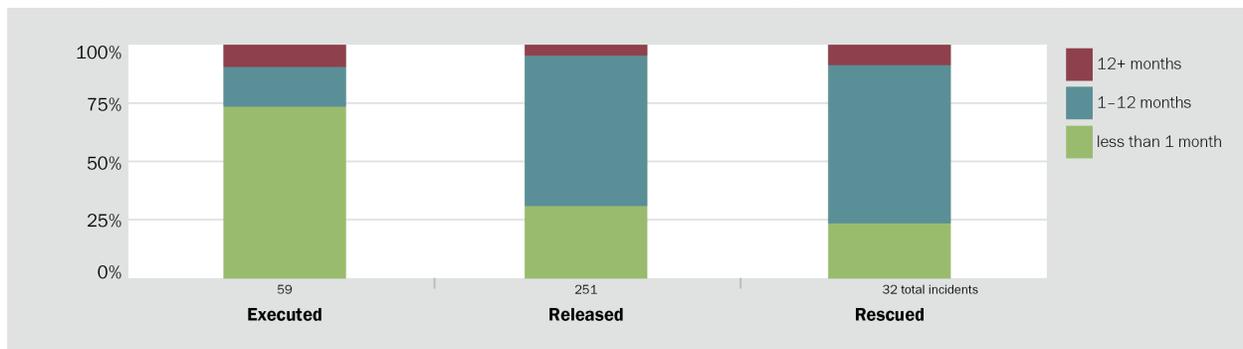
111 Tom Keatinge, "Rampant Ransoms," *Foreign Affairs*, 26 January 2015. Rukmini Callimachi, "Paying Ransoms, Europe Bankrolls Qaeda Terror," *New York Times*, 29 July 2014. Ellen Knickmeyer, "Al Qaeda-Linked Groups Increasingly Funded by Ransom," *Wall Street Journal*, 29 July 2014. Ken Dilanian, "Al Qaeda group is operating on ransom money from the West," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 October 2013.

112 David S. Cohen, Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, Remarks at The Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, "Attacking ISIL's Financial Foundation," 23 October 2014 and Remarks at Chatham House "Kidnapping for Ransom: The Growing Terrorist Financing Challenge" 5 October 2012. Damien McElroy, "Al-Qaeda's scathing letter to troublesome employee Mokhtar Belmokhtar reveals inner workings of terrorist group," *Telegraph*, 29 May 2013.

113 Of the 399 Western victims of Sunni jihadist kidnappings in the CTC Dataset, 373 (93%) have both the outcome and date of resolution identified.

Over the remainder of the first year, as the victim is likely stabilized and guarded and negotiations begin, the execution rates drop to 5%, while the release rates climb to 77%. This is also historically the best window for rescue attempts; 68% of successful rescues happen during this year (Figure 30). Of that sample of successful rescues, 58% occur within the second and third months of captivity. After the end of the first year, dual challenges begin operating on the parties involved in the incident. For the kidnapping organization, as the burden of keeping the captive fed and secured likely begins to wear on the organization, execution rates again rise. Of the cases that were resolved after a year, 17% ended in execution. For the governments and private entities involved in trying to secure the release of the hostage, the length of time becomes similarly challenging. Indeed, the smallest percentage of releases (43%) occur in cases that are resolved after a year; while successful rescues account for 9% of the cases resolved in this timeframe.

Figure 30: Select Outcomes of Westerner Abductions by Jihadist Groups, by Duration



Again, as in all the previous sections, this broad picture of jihadist operations varies substantially by group type and it is critical for policymakers and practitioners to have a general understanding, not only of the baseline trends, but also of the group-specific histories of their interactions with Western hostages. Figure 31 displays group-specific duration trends and outcomes of Western kidnappings. Rescues, releases, and executions are shown over three broad time periods (less than a month, 1-12 months, and more than 12 months). It is important to understand that these charts reveal rough historical trends, but do not speak to the influence that specific events and leaders can have on the outcome of future kidnappings.

Before interpreting any specific group result, it is important to remember that the number of cases for any group in any individual column will vary widely. For example, in the column for “12+ months” for the group al-Shabaab, there was only one individual, who was executed by the group. In the column immediately before that (1-12 months), there were two hostages, who were both released. This should not be interpreted as implying that hostages held by al-Shabaab for longer than one year will always be executed; this is simply what we found in the one case in our dataset that fit these criteria.

The result from group to group mostly mirrors the trend discussed earlier of a higher execution rate in the first period (if a group has executed hostages), more releases in the second time period, and then more executions in the third period. The biggest exception to this trend (in a group where we have a fair amount of data) is the Taliban. While cases going beyond 12 months are rare overall, in our dataset those whose cases have been resolved after a year were all released. The reason for the difference is not immediately apparent.

Figure 31: Outcomes and Duration of Western Kidnappings by Individual Jihadist Groups



Findings in Context

This report has examined kidnappings of Westerners from a number of different angles, with a particular focus on kidnappings perpetrated by jihadist organizations. During the research and writing of this report, several general points have emerged. While we present these points using examples from jihadist groups, our intuition is that these points are broadly applicable across the larger universe of kidnappings of Westerners.

The first has to do with the conventional wisdom that kidnappings are the result of detailed planning and cunning execution by terrorist groups. In other words, the belief is that motivations of terrorist groups in general, and jihadist groups in particular, determine who will be kidnapped, when the abduction will occur, and who will carry out the actual abduction.

Terrorist kidnapping incidents can be thought of as having roughly two general types; planned operations and opportunistic abductions. Our assertion that terrorist actors are not always the primary movers in abductions should not take away from the fact that they can, and do, plan to kidnap Western hostages. One of the best examples of this is the 2001 raid conducted on the Dos Palmas resort in the Philippines by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). The operation was clearly deliberately planned. A 21-man detachment of ASG fighters left their stronghold on the island Basilan and traveled 300 miles across the ocean to the island of Palawan, a tourist haven, with the intent of raiding a diving resort that catered to foreign tourists. While the group ultimately attacked the wrong resort, they still abducted three American hostages, one who was executed by the group within a month, and two who were kept longer. Philippine security forces eventually launched a rescue operation, killing one hostage and freeing the other.¹¹⁴

It is also clear however, that a significant amount of other abductions are far less deliberate and are often functions of chance encounters and opportunistic jihadists. The abductions of two journalists, one in 2007 and one in 2008, highlight this kind of kidnapping. Both reporters, one Italian and one American, had arranged to interview members of the Taliban leadership. In both cases they were intercepted and captured by other Taliban factions before they could reach their destinations. The ambiguity of the events prevents us from being able to determine if the abductions were sheer chance or the product of some collaboration with the journalists' local guides. Regardless, their abductions were not deliberate attempts to capture a hostage and appear to have been, at most, opportunistic kidnappings.¹¹⁵

In some cases Western governments and media sources have hyped the capability of terrorist organizations, potentially giving them credit for planned abductions they do not deserve. The 2003 abduction of 32 European tourists in Algeria is one such event. According to the majority of reporting and the narrative summaries from the U.N.'s Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, which designated the perpetrators of the kidnapping as members of al-Qa`ida eligible for international sanctions, the attack was a highly planned operation:

"The members of this group traveled to the Sahara region in southern Algeria in and around December 2002 in preparation for the kidnappings, as this area had been selected as a suitable operational area. They procured the necessary equipment and facilities and set up depots with food and fuel, mapping out their locations. They set up hidden camps and secured the roads leading to them."¹¹⁶

A report by the Algerian newspaper *El Watan* profiling Saifi Ammari, the commander of the operation, reveals a different narrative, however. According to *El Watan*, the preparations discussed above took

114 Mark Bowden, "Jihadists in Paradise," *Atlantic*, March 2007.

115 Daniele Mastrogiacomo, *Days of Fear: A Firsthand Account of Captivity Under the New Taliban* (New York: Europa Editions, 2009).
Jere Van Dyke, *Captive: My Time as a Prisoner of the Taliban* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2010).

116 "Narrative Summary for QDi.152 Saifi Ammari," *UN Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee*, 7 September 2010.

place 500 miles away in Batna, Algeria.¹¹⁷ Ammari and his men were preparing for an ambush against Algerian paratroopers that took place in January 2003. The decision to conduct the kidnappings in February 2003 happened in a “spontaneous way.” The report alleges the impetus for confronting the tourists was to steal their vehicles. An account of a survivor provides a similar account, stating that Ammari and his group were enroute to Niger to buy weapons and during their travel “came up with the brilliant idea to fund their arms purchases by (the) kidnapping of tourists.”¹¹⁸

While these opportunistic kidnappings do not make terrorist groups any less dangerous, they provide some context to the discussion of terrorist motivations and intentionality, which is a critical part of understanding how these incidents occur, how to prevent them, and how to best respond once they have occurred.

The second thing we have noticed concerns the motivations of jihadist organizations. The conventional wisdom is that because terrorist groups seek funding, they will prefer hostages they can ransom. If, instead, the group seeks to threaten Western countries or bolster its reputation, it will abduct and execute a citizen of a prominent Western power for propaganda gains.

There is some support for the notion that jihadist groups, at least at the leadership level, advocate the targeting of particular nationalities. A draft of a letter retrieved from Usama bin Ladin’s Abbottabad residence in 2010 (likely written by bin Ladin or his advisor Atiyah Abd al-Rahman) encouraged the targeting of civilians, especially diplomats, who were citizens of countries supporting military operations in Afghanistan.¹¹⁹ In 2010, the deputy commander of AQAP threatened to kidnap Saudis, saying, “Al-Qa`ida is organizing cells to kidnap...princes, ministers, and officials including military commanders.”¹²⁰ Finally, a communique released by Ayman al-Zawahiri in 2012 encouraged his followers to kidnap Western citizens, with an emphasis on American citizens.¹²¹ While these statements and letters show that jihadist leaders advocated the abduction of particular nationalities, they do not support the idea that terrorist groups simply have binary motivations of either money or propaganda when it comes to kidnapping.

It may be more helpful to think of jihadist motivations as varied and flexible rather than singular and predetermined. While conducting the analysis for this report, it became apparent that the motivations of groups holding hostages range from a desire to coerce policy shifts, to ransom, to executions for the sake of propaganda, depending on what is most beneficial to the organization and most achievable. Other motivations may include exchanging prisoners, or simply causing embarrassment to a foreign and/or local government.

From bin Ladin’s letters, it is clear that policy shifts, particularly pressuring Western governments to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan, were his top priority, a point made in both the draft letter mentioned above and subsequent correspondence. In September 2010, five French citizens were abducted in Niger by AQIM. Ten days after the abduction, bin Ladin wrote a letter expressing his wish that Atiyah urgently notify AQIM’s leadership that the negotiations with the French be based on their withdrawal from Afghanistan, not monetary ransom.¹²²

A secondary priority for bin Ladin was the release of al-Qa`ida prisoners. When al-Shabaab acquired

117 Salima Tlemçani, “R v lations sur le parcours d’un chef terroriste,” *El Watan*, 10 April 2006.

118 Rainer Bracht, *177 Tage Angst: Tagebuch einer Entf hrung Taschenbuch*, February 2004

119 Harmony Project, SOCOM-2012-0000017, “A Letter Regarding Al-Qaida Strategy,” Combating Terrorism Center, 2012.

120 Erika Solomon, “Al Qaeda threatens to kidnap Saudi royals: TV,” Reuters, 3 June 2010.

121 Chelsea J. Carter, “Al Qaeda leader calls for kidnapping of Westerners,” CNN, 28 October 2012.

122 “Letter to Shaykh Mahmud,” 26 September 2010, released by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODIN), 2. The published translation misses the critical “not” in the following sentence: and provision of your comments. “Please send a letter to the brothers in the Islamic Maghreb urgently that includes an indication for them to (not) negotiate with the French to release their prisoners in exchange of money.” Refined translation provided by Muhammad al-Ubaydi.

Denis Alex in July 2009, the group's first public demand, issued in June 2010, was for the release of prisoners. Bin Ladin, in an April 2011 letter to Atiyah, hoped Alex would be exchanged for "our prisoners with them [the French] or with their allies."¹²³ It was only if they reached a "road block" in negotiations, he advised, that Alex was to "be ransomed for money."¹²⁴ Zawahiri's 2012 call for the kidnapping of Americans was also tied to prisoner exchanges, rather than ransoms or executions. He mentioned "captive Muslims" generally and specifically mentioned attempting to free Omar Abdel-Rahman, "the Blind Sheik," before adding, "I ask Allah to help us capture from among the Americans and the Westerners to enable us to exchange them for our captives."¹²⁵

This concept of an array of demands is bolstered by a 2004 guide to kidnapping and barricade operations written by AQAP's Abdelaziz al-Murqin. In the introduction, Murqin presents many of the same motivations for conducting hostage missions. He provides reasons such as "forcing the government... to acquiesce to some demands," placing a government in a "political dilemma" and causing it embarrassment, and "getting money."¹²⁶

Executions are rarely mentioned in this discourse. Bin Ladin specifically cautions AQIM against executing their French prisoners, warning the current political environment does not "support killing the French" and that it would reflect poorly on them.¹²⁷ He offers similar advice for al-Shabaab in the same letter, but admits the "reaction to killing would be less if the killing was from their (al-Shabaab's) side" rather than AQIM. In the correspondence that has been made public to this date, bin Ladin only recommends killing Western hostages once, to the Taliban, in relation to negotiations with the French, "should they not provide a timeline for their withdrawal."¹²⁸ Al-Murqin only mentions executing hostages in barricade situations and never discusses the concept of a propaganda-based execution. A letter from al-Qa`ida to the family of abducted American aid worker Warren Weinstein only says that without negotiations Weinstein would die "a lonely death in prison" rather than offering a direct threat.¹²⁹ These examples are not provided to indicate that terrorist groups are not willing to kill their victims, as the previous discussion on outcome showed that this is a reality. It only highlights the fact that the common conception of a binary choice between ransom and execution as motivations does not capture the nuance demonstrated by the reality of these situations.

It is important to emphasize also that various organizations and individual leaders approach these incidents differently, even within groups. A 2012 letter from AQIM's Shura Council to its commander of the Sahara region, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, indicates problems enforcing political goals across the organization. The letter lambasts Belmokhtar for his past failings, among them his mismanagement of the "kidnapping file." The letter criticizes his "unilateral behavior" in handling the 2008 abduction of Canadian diplomats Robert Fowler and Louis Guay and his negotiation of an "inadequate" ransom. The authors of the letter indicate that AQIM had tried to give the case "an international dimension" by coordinating with the Afghanistan based leadership of al-Qa`ida and seeking troop withdrawals, prisoner releases, and a ransom.¹³⁰ Belmokhtar's control of the hostages and geographic isolation from the AQIM leadership, however, let him pursue his own financially motivated goals at the potential

123 Bin Ladin's text says "Regarding the British officer captured by our brother in Somalia" but the rest of the paragraph discusses placing political pressure on France. Additionally, no "British officer" has been reported to have been captured by al-Shabaab, leading these authors to believe that Bin Ladin made a typographical mistake.

124 Harmony Project, SOCOM-2012-0000010, "Letter from UBL to `Atiyatullah Al-Libi," Combating Terrorism Center, 2012, p. 6.

125 Carter, "Al Qaeda leader calls for kidnapping of Westerners."

126 "Al Qaeda Guide to Kidnapping," *New York Times*, 29 July 2014.

127 Harmony Documents, SOCOM-2012-0000010, Combating Terrorism Center, 2012, p. 5.

128 "Letter to Shaykh Mahmud," p. 2.

129 "Al-Qaeda Addresses Message to Family of U.S. Hostage Warren Weinstein," SITE Intelligence Group, 13 August 2013.

130 Letter from the AQIM Shura Council to the Shura Council of the Masked Brigade, 5. Damien McElroy, "Al-Qa`ida's scathing letter to troublesome employee Mokhtar Belmokhtar reveals inner workings of terrorist group," *Telegraph*, 29 May 2013.

expense of the larger al-Qa`ida enterprise.

Finally, the third thing that has become clear from this research is that the notion of terrorist actors managing and controlling the outcome of kidnapping incidents is not always true. Sometimes, jihadist groups are neither the only nor primary actors in determining the outcomes of these incidents.

Another common conception is that jihadist groups primarily drive outcomes and the group's decision to execute or release the hostage accounts for the totality of the hostage's fate. Here, too, it is instructive to break down the potential influencers of outcomes into two categories; (1) terrorist-planned, (2) influenced by exogenous events and/or third parties.

Just as in the discussion of the abductions, it is important to reiterate that sometimes terrorist organizations actually are the driving force behind the hostage's fate. Terrorist organizations have made the strategic decision to execute their hostages for propaganda purposes. Although he was not a member of an OECD country, the case of Muath al-Kasasbeh, the Jordanian pilot captured by the Islamic State is particularly instructive. After capturing him, the Islamic State publically called Jordan to negotiate, demanding the release of an al-Qa`ida prisoner held in Jordan, but ultimately executed the pilot. After the execution, reports surfaced that al-Kasasbeh had been killed by the Islamic State weeks prior to the demands the organization leveraged against Jordan. If true, this is an example of an instance where the terrorist group was undoubtedly the deciding factor behind the hostage's execution and demonstrated their desire to continue to use the situation to inflict embarrassment and create conflict in Jordan.

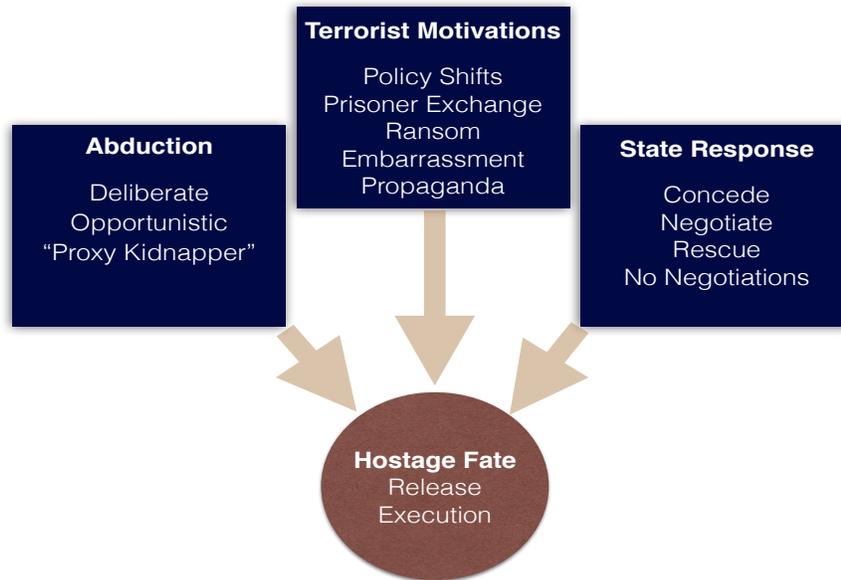
A second nuance worth drawing out is the impact of chance and random events on the decision-making process of a terrorist group when determining the fate of a hostage. Here again the case of Denis Alex, the French intelligence agent held by al-Shabaab is useful. Alex was kidnapped in 2009, and as previously mentioned, demands had been made against the French government in 2010. In January 2013, he was still being held captive. That month, French forces raided an al-Shabaab base in Bullo Marer, Somalia in an attempt to rescue him. Two French commandos were killed and Alex remained in al-Shabaab captivity. Shortly after the operation, al-Shabaab announced it would execute him in retaliation for the raid, saying "with the rescue attempt, France has voluntarily signed Alex's death warrant."¹³¹ While the likelihood certainly exists that Alex was killed during the rescue attempt and the al-Shabaab statements were primarily for propaganda purposes, this case raises a simple, but important point: factors outside the terrorist group's motivations and desires influence the outcomes of kidnapping events.

At the time of the rescue attempt, Alex had been held for over three years, among the longest of jihadist captivities. Had the group desired to kill him sooner, they had ample opportunity to do so. Yet, after the rescue attempt either for purposes of revenge or because of a new risk analysis, the organizational calculus changed and Alex was executed.

While some might object to this line of reasoning as a type of victim blaming leveraged at Western governments, this is far from the authors' intents. It is important to realize, appreciate, and plan for the impact that government responses (and non-responses) have on the dynamics of jihadist kidnappings. In fact, if the previously presented array of demands are representative of jihadist motivations, then it is clear that governments can be as central to the outcome of the kidnapping event as the terrorist organization. It is worth remembering that within the realm of documents declassified thus far, almost every time bin Ladin mentioned shifting from one demand to another, it was the result of a potential state action.

131 Jason Straziuso and Abdi Guled, "Somali terrorists say they executed French intelligence agent in retaliation for botched rescue raid," Associated Press, 17 January 2013.

Figure 32: Potential Determinants of a Hostage’s Fate



All these points combine to suggest that more than just terrorists’ deliberate and calculated decisions determine the fate of kidnapping victims. Although their motivations play an important role, many factors discussed in this report are at play in the ultimate outcome of kidnapping events. Figure 32 draws on the previous discussions to highlight some of these factors. The actual abduction, whether it is conducted by terrorists or other agents, can provide some insights about the level of intentionality of the terrorist actors, which in turn, may impact their demands and the outcome of the event. The demands themselves and state responses can also be critical to determining the fate of the hostage. This interplay points to the importance of finding, aggregating, and analyzing data about historical trends in kidnappings as well as carefully examining the context in which each event occurs.

In the end, the purpose of this report and the accompanying data collection effort was to create a product that would provide policymakers, practitioners, and academics with an increased understanding of Westerner kidnappings. This report has illustrated that the complexity of these events is not impenetrable, and our hope is that this report and data serve as a springboard for continued efforts to address this difficult problem.

Policy Implications

This report provides needed empirical data and critical insights into the increasing trend of non-state actors kidnapping Westerners, and it provides a more nuanced view of the behavior of jihadist groups who are employing this tactic in greater frequency. Below are some of the key takeaways and some areas that warrant more scrutiny to best inform policy on this topic. Recommendations for additional research for each of those takeaways are also included.

Kidnapping and hostage taking are increasing.

The preliminary data in this report largely confirms what many have suspected from casual viewing of the news and media reports. While there are undoubtedly some kidnapping cases that may have been missed in our dataset our data shows there have been increasing numbers of kidnapping/hostage incidents over the past five years. While these have been perpetrated by both jihadist and non-jihadist groups, jihadist groups are largely responsible for the increase. Importantly, the trend cannot be linked to the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq alone, nor can they be isolated to one region; the trend is global, and it has shifted over time from Latin America to the Middle East/North Africa region and now to South and Southeast Asia. We should expect it to shift again in the future and more scholarly work should examine this phenomena.

Recommendation:

Bolster the data set developed for Section 2 of this report by investing in more rigorous and sustained open-source data collection on the kidnapping of Westerners, and in doing so, create an enduring data archive that will help the U.S. Government better evaluate trends over time.

Some occupational backgrounds are far more likely to be kidnapped in conflict zones.

While on its face, it makes sense that members of the military are more likely to be abducted in conflict zones, the trend applied to multiple occupational backgrounds. Journalists, who make up 18% of jihadist abductions, are most likely to be kidnapped in conflict zones. Conversely, individuals affiliated with NGOs (35% of jihadist abductions) are just as likely to be kidnapped outside a conflict zone.

Recommendation:

Employers of individuals whose occupational background correlates with higher kidnapping rates in conflict zones should review their training, force protection measures, and have predetermined kidnapping management policies. Individuals sent to such zones should be trained in order to better prepare themselves and their families in the event of abduction (i.e., contingent powers of attorney and predetermined passwords for email and social media accounts). Individuals who work with NGOs, for whom the risk of jihadist abduction extends beyond conflict zones, should also consider taking these actions.

Islamic State/AQI and al-Shabaab, have the highest execution rates of kidnapped Westerners; Jabhat al-Nusra and Boko Haram do not have a current track record of this to date.

The Islamic State and its precursor organizations (ISIL/ISI/AQI) have the highest execution rates for kidnapped Westerners (45%), while al-Shabaab (25%) has the next highest rate. Interestingly, neither Boko Haram nor Jabhat al-Nusra have executed the Westerners they have had in captivity (11 and eight, respectively). Boko Haram has released all 11 of its Western hostages, yet this might change with their recent merger with the Islamic State. Jabhat al-Nusra captives have either escaped or been released. There is also some open-source reporting that shows groups like Jabhat al-Nusra have sold kidnapped Westerners to other militant groups.¹³²

Several factors could explain this variation between jihadist groups. For example, groups like AQIM, which is known to have conducted many kidnappings may do so in part because it is financially reliant on these activities. For groups such as the Islamic State that have a robust and diversified financial portfolio, however, the benefits from the symbolic execution of an American may outweigh the marginal bump in revenue from a ransom. Additionally, the execution of a Western hostage may be a well-thought out and deliberate action by some groups. In other cases, it is likely that kidnapped Westerners are killed by their captors in haste when a rescue operation is imminent or in progress.

Recommendation:

Map out the timelines associated with the kidnapping campaigns of jihadist groups, with the goal of identifying when each group conducted its first execution of a Westerner and the circumstances surrounding that execution, to see if there are any potential signals or indicators that could illustrate that Jabhat al-Nusra and Boko Haram might execute their first Western hostage. Comparisons against the groups' operations may provide further insights.

Some jihadist organizations benefit from relationships with "proxy kidnapers" to provide them captives.

Not all abductions are conducted by jihadist groups themselves. In some cases criminal or other militant groups transfer or sell hostages to jihadist organizations. Often it is unclear if this is a result of the jihadist group "contracting" these groups, or if jihadist willingness to purchase Western hostages is well known to other illegitimate actors.

Recommendation:

Expand existing designations frameworks such as the U.S. Treasury Office of Foreign Asset Control's Specially Designated Global Terrorist list or the U.S. Department of State's Rewards for Justice Program to designate individuals involved in these networks in order to disrupt their networks and operations.

Recommendation:

Bolster defense and law enforcement programs that build partner capacity in countries with pervasive kidnapping problems. These efforts should support law enforcement and security forces efforts to disrupt the operations of these networks and strengthen judicial systems in order to facilitate convictions and longer prison sentences.

132 James Harkin, "ISIS: The Syrian Middlemen Who Trade in Hostages," *GQ-Britain*, November 2014. Jenny Lei Ravelo, "MSF Keeps Mum on Reports Staff Sold to Somali Pirates," *Devex.com*, January 11, 2012.

The likelihood of being executed is the highest in the first 30 days of captivity.

In our dataset, most executions of Western hostages by jihadist groups occurred within the first 30 days of captivity (70%). If a kidnapped Westerner survived the first month of captivity, the likelihood of execution in the remaining year dropped to 5%. Those who survived more than a year in captivity had a 17% likelihood of being executed. Most (known) successful rescue operations in our dataset occurred in the first six months of being held captive by jihadists (particularly months two and three). Interestingly, of those released by jihadists, most Westerners are released in the first six months as well.

Recommendation:

Leverage the data created for Section 2 of this report, described immediately above, to evaluate the ideal timeframe to potentially conduct a hostage rescue operation. According to our data, Western hostages held by jihadist groups are least likely to be executed between months two and 12 of their captivity.

A significant number of the perpetrators in the CTC Hostage Database are unknown.

While these entries may be due in large part due to unavailable information, it is possible that some of these abductions were conducted by jihadist groups who actively hid their affiliation.

Recommendation:

Invest additional effort in non-English language research to try to identify unknown groups. Additionally, an investigation of the timelines associated with jihadist claims of responsibility and the outcomes of the cases may provide added insights into when and why jihadist groups take responsibility for Western abductions.

Appendix A: The Inclusion of Pirates

Some may object to the inclusion of seaborne abductions in a kidnapping report because the activity is motivated by criminal reasons. Such abductions are viewed differently from those perpetrated by the non-state actors that form the main focus of our study. The inclusion of these incidents is tied to our goal of differentiating the dynamics of kidnapping by jihadist groups from other non-state actors and providing relevant information for both the policy and academic communities. It is also tied to the idea that while piracy can be classified as a criminal or economic activity, there exist few permanent “types” of piracy and many pirates are involved, to varying degrees, in political violence which threatens states.¹³³ We feel that three considerations specifically related to the collection of seaborne incidents merit their inclusion: the relationship between terrorist organizations and organizations conducting seaborne incidents, the data challenges associated with collecting other types of criminal kidnapping, and the relevance of seaborne incidents to the military community.

While the connections between piracy and terrorism are not ironclad, there are indications that links between Somali piracy and al-Shabaab exist. To be clear, al-Shabaab itself has not captured any ships as of this writing. However, it has legitimized the practice of hijacking non-Muslim ships. A senior al-Shabaab official exhorted the value of the “sea jihad” in September 2010, encouraging followers to target American ships at sea.¹³⁴ Al-Shabaab has also captured and controlled traditional pirate ports demanding “taxation” on ransom payments.¹³⁵ A 2010 expansion into the pirate port of Haradhere and the detention of pirate leaders in February 2011 ended with an agreement for a 20% tax on ransom payments made on ships taken to al-Shabaab-controlled territory.¹³⁶ A July 2011 report by Reuters found that \$1.1 million in “taxes” had been paid to al-Shabaab from ransoms collected that year.¹³⁷ A recently declassified letter from bin Ladin’s residence in Abbottabad indicates that al-Qa`ida encouraged connections between al-Shabaab and piracy, “We hope you will send a letter to the brothers in Somalia,” the author, likely bin Ladin,¹³⁸ wrote, “to avoid declaring their solidarity with the al-Qa`ida, and to give their full attention to collecting ransom money and hijack[ing] ships.”¹³⁹ There have also been reports of Western hostages sold to pirate groups by al-Shabaab¹⁴⁰ and threats by pirate groups to hand over Western hostages to al-Shabaab if ransoms were not paid.¹⁴¹ While these instances do not necessarily indicate an operational relationship between al-Shabaab and piracy groups, they do indicate a more significant relationship between a portion of pirate organizations and terrorist groups than evident in other criminal groups.

Ideally, this study would have included a category focusing on criminal kidnappings to provide even more fidelity on the phenomena and dynamics of kidnapping as it pertains to Western hostages. Collecting a representative sample of criminal kidnapping, however, is not feasible due to the issues of underreporting previously mentioned in the Data and Methods section. In addition, the large number of such cases that would have to be sorted would make such a dataset prohibitively time-consuming

133 Mark Shirk (2015): *How Does Violence Threaten the State? Four Narratives on Piracy, Terrorism and Political Violence*

134 Sarah Childress, “Somali Militants try piracy to fund attacks,” *Wall Street Journal*, 9 September 2010.

135 Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group* (New York, Oxford University Press: 2013), pp. 110–112.

136 Mohamed Ahmed, “Somali rebels agree ransom deal with pirate leaders,” Reuters, 22 February 2011.

137 Richard Lough, “Piracy ransom cash ends up with Somali militants,” Reuters, 6 July 2011.

138 The declassified portion of the letter does not include either the date or the author’s name. The letter, however, is addressed to Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, a senior advisor to bin Ladin, and requests that he communicate requests to al-Qa`ida linked groups in a similar fashion to other letters written by bin Ladin.

139 “Letter Addressed to Atiyah.” Released by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 3.

140 Ventia Archer, “Piracy Report: Pirates Turn Attention Towards Onland Hostages,” *Somalia Report*, 13 January 2012. Argot Kiser, “How Somali pirates and terrorists made bank off two Western hostages,” *Vocativ*, 6 August 2013. No additional corroborating sources for this reporting were found while researching this incident.

141 Abdi Abitdoon and Robert Pelton, “Video of American Hostage Michael Scott Moore,” *Somalia Report*, 20 May 2012.

to assemble. In contrast, reporting on the seaborne abduction of Westerners associated with piracy is more widely available, increasing the chances that a representative sample can be collected.

Furthermore, the threat to Westerners from Somali pirate gangs is not all related to their connections to al-Shabaab. Somali pirate networks, which have the infrastructure to support long-term detentions, have not limited their kidnapping operations to seaborne abductions. In the five months between September 2011 and January 2012, Somali pirate groups abducted six Western hostages in four land-based abductions and held them for a median of 418 days. While rare, some piracy events have ended in the deaths of Western hostages, most notably the execution of four Americans abducted aboard the SV *Quest* in 2011.¹⁴² Additionally, Western governments have taken abductions seriously enough to employ national-level military assets to rescue their citizens kidnapped by pirate groups. Richard Phillips, Jessica Buchanan, and Poul Hagen Thisted were all rescued from pirate groups in operations by U.S. military forces. Evidence also exists indicating that pirate groups can sometimes specifically target Westerners for political purposes. In a reaction to the October 2013 arrest of pirate leader Mohamed Abdi Hassan “Afweyne” in Brussels, his son, also a pirate leader, announced a \$500,000 reward for a Belgian hostage he could use as leverage to release his father.¹⁴³

Finally, while seaborne abductions are a unique subset of the kidnapping of Western citizens, our discussions with policymakers and practitioners have indicated that the potential interaction between some pirate groups and terrorist organizations provides enough value to them to include these events in the database and provide some analysis of their associated dynamics.

Taken together, these three reasons, in our view, make a compelling case for including in this report kidnapping incidents involving Westerners that occur at sea. However, for those who disagree with this decision, the dataset upon which this analysis is based will be made publicly available, allowing for seaborne incidents to be easily sorted out.

142 “Three Somali Pirates Sentenced to Life in Prison for Murders of Four Americans Aboard SV *Quest*,” U.S. Attorney’s Office Eastern District of Virginia, 2 August 2013.

143 “S/2014/726: Somalia Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea submitted in accordance with Resolution 2111,” United Nations, 15 October 2014.

