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The Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) in London: Countering Overseas Terrorist Financing and Support with "Nudge" and Situational Approaches

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ABSTRACT

Overseas diasporas have long been exploited by terrorist organisations seeking funding and support from areas beyond their operation. The Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), active in south-eastern Turkey, is no exception and maintains a significant international presence. This paper uses 73 survey responses and 13 interviews amongst London's Turkish and Kurdish diaspora to provide an original and comprehensive insight into the PKK's overseas operations, including their offending patterns, methods, hotspots, offender/victim profiles and existing countermeasures. Respondents were also consulted on new community-based prevention measures designed to address limited law enforcement responses and the *laissez-faire* approaches of diaspora host countries. This strategy, which combines crime science and behavioural economic theories, consists of Clarke's "Situational Crime Prevention" theory and Thaler and Sunstein's "Nudge" theory (SCP+N). The results indicate that the PKK creates criminal opportunities by "legitimising" itself across diasporas by invoking ideological sympathy and social dependence (conceptualised as "constructed legitimisers"), ensuring minimal resistance to its activities. SCP+N is motivated as an effective counterstrategy, addressing both the rational and impulsive nature of offending. The overall theoretical contribution of this paper is to assess overseas terrorist financing through a prevention-oriented, situational and behavioural framework, and to propose a community-based strategy to effectively counter such activities.

Introduction

"You can 'hang the criminal' all you like. The crime will always continue to exist."

Overseas fundraising and support have long been a lifeline of the world's most long-lasting terrorist organisations. Existing responses have traditionally relied on the police, financial services and judicial process. The above quote, however, which came from the very first interviewee of this research, demonstrates how even victims of terrorist extortion acknowledge that the solution extends beyond capturing and sentencing perpetrators. In recognition, this paper aims to understand the dynamics behind the fundraising phase of overseas terrorist financing; namely, the raising of funds to support terrorist groups or to finance attacks.[1]

Using original survey and interview data, this paper will focus on the overseas terrorist financing and propaganda operations of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) across the Turkish and Kurdish diaspora in London as a case study. Active in south-eastern Turkey since 1978, the PKK gains a significant portion of its funds through targeting Turkish and Kurdish diasporas across Europe, despite being proscribed as a terrorist organisation by the United Kingdom and European Union.

With its mixed-methods approach, this paper provides one of the most in-depth studies into how diaspora communities are exploited for terrorist financing activities by organisations such as the PKK.

Additionally, using insights collected from survey and interview respondents, this paper will propose situational crime prevention (SCP) enhanced by "Nudge" theory (SCP+N) as a possible prevention strategy. The literature review will outline the PKK's overseas activities and then introduce these preventative theories. The research methodology and results will follow, detailing the PKK's operations in London, changes over time, types of activities, crime hotspots, offender/victim profiles and respondent perceptions of current and proposed prevention measures. The discussion will assess whether the proposed SCP+N measures would effectively deter the PKK specifically and, more generally, against wider serious organised crimes and terrorist financing operations.

This paper seeks to provide new perspectives to understand how diasporic terrorist financing offences occur and how resistance from preventative authorities is minimised, using the PKK as an example case study. In aiming to develop these new perspectives, the paper contributes new concepts based on findings, such as "constructed legitimisers" (namely manipulable societal characteristics that terrorist organisations can exploit to legitimise their activities in their target community), which are elaborated in depth in the discussion. Such findings are crucial to explain the ineffective counter-measures of the present, and emphasise that a joint community-based approach targeting both the rational and irrational aspects of offending (i.e. SCP+N) is necessary to counter "legitimised" terrorist financing offences effectively.

The Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK)

The dismembering of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire, as well as failed Allied attempts to establish separate states on former Ottoman soil based on ethnic borders under the unfulfilled 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, led to a conscious Kurdish identity developing mainly in the south-east of modern Turkey when it was established in 1923.[2] Since then, the "Kurdish Question" has become a dominant issue in Turkish politics. Historically, political discourse in Turkey has prioritised uniting citizens based on nationality, namely "Turkish," regardless of their ethnicity,[3] causing a degree of discontent amongst vocal Kurdish circles.[4] Aggravating factors, such as the 1980 military coup d'état (that significantly stifled said circles), minority rights concerns, emerging communist-nationalist unrest during the Cold War and economic underdevelopment in Turkey's south-eastern regions have been cited as reasons for the continuation of the "Kurdish Question" issue in Turkish politics.[5] Despite attempts to address both domestic and international concerns over minority rights, Turkish governments (continuously involving nationalist and right-wing parties since the 1980s) have seldom undertaken serious attempts to solve the issue.[6] Per the country's (now stalled) accession negotiations to the European Union, efforts were made in the early 2000s to increase linguistic and media freedoms, including the ending of a state of emergency and military influence in the administration of south-eastern provinces.[7]

The *Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (Kurdistan Worker's Party, PKK) was formed in 1978 and conducted their first attack in 1984, aiming to establish a separate Kurdish state while alleging oppression of cultural, social and linguistic freedoms.[8] It's leader, Abdullah Öcalan, was captured in 1999 and imprisoned for life, inducing a unilateral ceasefire until 2004.[9] Another ceasefire lasted from 2013 to 2015 as part of a failed peace process with the Turkish Government.[10] Overall, from 1984 to 2015, PKK kidnappings and attacks against civilian and military targets have caused more than 55,000 deaths,[11] with significant wider economic implications on south-eastern Turkey where they are most active.[12]

Despite their widespread global recognition as a terrorist group involved in large-scale drug trafficking, the PKK became the dominant organisation shaping the discourse of Kurdish identity politics and nationalism in the region.[13] They developed a monopolistic ideological bond with sympathisers that allowed their violent activities to be overlooked or justified as part of a perceivably legitimate struggle,[14] while developing close relations with political parties, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and trade unions both in Turkey and worldwide that claim to represent Kurdish minority rights.

The internal and international displacement of residents from the south-east due to PKK activities have been significant, causing rival (pro- and anti-PKK) political sentiments and occasionally violence to spill over to many European countries.[15] Sympathisers emphasise their desires for further minority rights, while alleging suppression and forced displacement by the Turkish military.[16] Critics, meanwhile, have framed the dispute as a national security issue, citing a clear distinction between the legitimate actions of the Turkish state against a terrorist entity.[17]

The designation of the PKK as a terrorist group remains contested across different jurisdictions and political perspectives, on occasion becoming a contentious topic in terms of political and foreign policy (issues discussed further in due course). In 2020, for example, the Belgian Court of Cassation ruled that the PKK was not a terrorist organisation, creating a legal dispute with the Belgian government, which reaffirmed their designation as a terrorist group.[18] Given this article's U.K.-centric focus, where the PKK is proscribed under the U.K. legal definition of terrorism and the associated 2000 Terrorism Act as a terrorist group (and thus subject to terrorist financing legislation),[19] the PKK is considered as a terrorist group for the purposes of the current study. Definitional and theoretical disputes on whether this designation is accurate are beyond the scope of this article, which instead focuses on terrorist financing methods and prevention.

An overview of diaspora creation and the PKK's terrorist financing

Through the 1970s-80s, state sponsorship was a core source of revenue for many groups such as the PKK, with supporters including Syria, Greece and Armenia.[20] However, state sponsorship declined following the end of the Cold War due to United States pressure on former Soviet allies, forcing the PKK to look for alternative sources of income.[21]

Nevertheless, socio-political changes in the 1980s-90s provided new alternative funding sources. Firstly, globalisation and the increased mobility of goods, people and ideas across borders provided an incentive for many violent organisations to seek opportunities from beyond their area of operation.[22] Secondly and concurrently, conflict or persecution against certain ethnic peoples caused large communities to relocate abroad, allowing violent groups to seek support from overseas diasporas[23].

The PKK has one of the most extensive diaspora support and criminal networks in Europe, using it as a base for "propaganda, recruitment, fundraising and logistical support activities" according to EUROPOL.[24] Indeed, interviews throughout this research will document how the PKK themselves contributed to the formation of these diasporas through human smuggling operations. Europe's Kurdish diaspora population, in total, is estimated at one million, though these estimates are outdated and may underestimate the actual figure due to the lack of clear data.[25] PKK activities are spread across all European countries and are similar in nature, making the U.K. a viable case study to understand their *modi operandi*.[26]

The North London boroughs of Enfield, Haringey and Hackney were the preferred destinations of the Turkish and Kurdish diasporas in the U.K. (see Figure 1).[27] This was because of the pre-existence of a Turkish Cypriot community and several Kurdish support networks, as well as the responsive nature of local politicians to diaspora issues.[28]

The PKK's overseas terrorist financing tactics range from outrightly illegal activities such as organised drug trafficking to more "quasi-legal" activities, such as collecting donations through community and religious organisations under their influence.[30] These "quasi-legal" activities may seem legal at face value, but their underlying intention of financing terrorism requires them, per Financial Action Task Force (FATF) guidance, to be criminalised as terrorist financing activities.[31] The FATF is the international standard-setter for "anti-money laundering" and "combatting the financing of terrorism" (AML/CFT) regulations.[32]

The distinction between "illegal" and "quasi-legal" activities is not based on legal principles but is a theoretical one that is advantageous for devising prevention strategies, given the different attributes of these activities. For example, quasi-legal activities are more easily identifiable throughout the community and are more capable of exploiting legal loopholes than underground criminal activities.
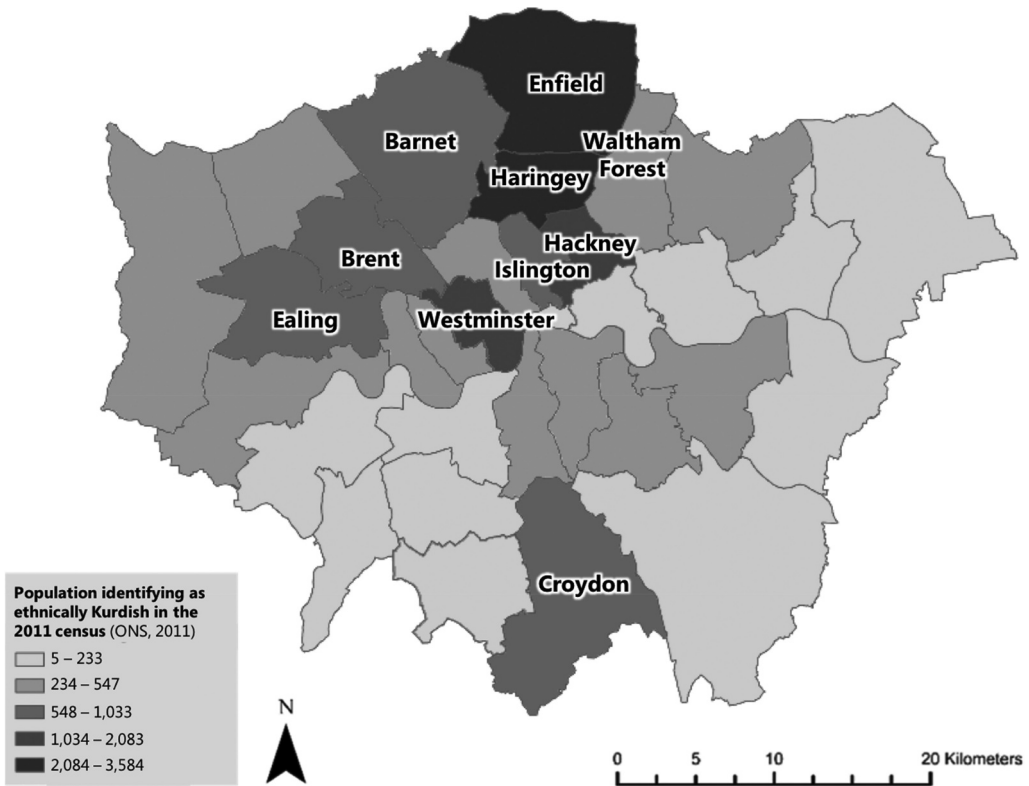
Figure 1. Population identifying as "Kurdish" in the 2011 U.K. census by London borough (top 10 named).[29] Note: "Kurdish" is not a pre-defined option on the census, so the figures only show those explicitly stating it as their ethnicity. This may be more prevalent amongst census respondents in boroughs (e.g., Enfield or Haringey) where the diaspora community (and thus consciousness of ethnic identity) are stronger.

Pro-PKK protests, for instance, may avoid breaking the law by not outrightly displaying PKK insignia, though may still be the site of donation collection and recruitment, thus making their inclusion in the current study relevant. Overall, segments of the Kurdish diaspora accounted for 50 percent of the PKK's annual funds during the 1990s, accumulated through both illegal and quasi-legal activities simultaneously,[33] discussed respectively below.

The PKK and transnational organised crime

The majority of the PKK's proceeds are widely attributed to drug crime. Turkish estimates in 2016, published for the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), estimated their annual drug trafficking revenue at 1.5 USD billion.[34] The report also alleged that the PKK controlled 80 percent of Europe's drugs market, though conservative estimates go as low as 50 percent.[35] Besides narcotics, the PKK maintains extensive human and tobacco smuggling, extortion and money laundering operations throughout Europe.[36]

Existing research on the links between organised crime and terrorism, often referred to as a "crime-terror nexus," portrays this as an internal restructuring of a terrorist group to fund their operations with criminal activities.[37] However, an alternative explanation is that the PKK has almost entirely transformed into an organised crime syndicate, using terrorism as a lower priority "façade" to maintain its political and ideological support.[38] The continuing financial and ideological support for the PKK despite the lack of political success indeed points to a sustainable internal structure, indicating apossible displacement of political motives by financial ones.

Quasi-legal activities and popular support

The PKK is represented by several legally established sympathetic community groups throughout Europe.[39] Data from 2008–09, the most recent available, identified 430 PKK-sympathetic advice, cultural, youth, political and media organisations across Europe, of which 20 were based in London.[40] Some even enjoy charity status and receive grants from governments.[41] Often acting in unison with PKK-sympathetic businesses, such groups hold widely attended festivals, conferences and other community events. Pro-PKK branding, fundraising, figureheads and discourse are often prevalent during these occasions.[42] In 2008, quasi-legal activities across Europe reportedly earned the PKK between 12 USD and 15 USD million in revenue.[43]

Quasi-legal activities are not just effective for fundraising but also for shaping public opinion and lobbying. PKK affiliated groups have been able to use their community influence to hold numerous sympathetic events, earning the support of policymakers and British trade unions in the process. Examples included "Freedom for [Abdullah] Öcalan" events held at both the U.K. Parliament and London City Hall in 2016 and 2019 respectively, with the presence and endorsements of U.K. and Turkish members of parliament, senior trade unionists, Öcalan's family members and local councillors.[44] The PKK's European lobbying efforts correspond to a wider aim by the group to become a regional foreign policy actor, which has implications for countering their financing operations—as discussed in the next section.

International responses to the PKK

The PKK was designated as a terrorist organisation by the United States in 1997, by the U.K. in 2001 and by the EU in 2002.[45] However, the PKK is active in a crucial region (Northern Iraq and Syria) in terms of global energy and security dynamics.[46] Ever since Turkish diplomatic efforts caused a reduction in state sponsorship and the capture of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, the PKK has increasingly prioritised foreign policy considerations. Therefore, responses to its diaspora activities are significantly affected by the regional interests of diaspora host countries.

During the Cold War, the PKK was considered "the most violent and anti-US" of all Kurdish groups due to its backing from the Soviet Union.[47] However, with the USSR dissolved, the ideological war subsided, and rival powers competed over sources and transportation of oil in the Middle East. Looking for leverage in the region, the PKK attacked key oil pipelines as a means of signalling possible alliances in return for support for its regional and diasporic aspirations.[48] The most notable of these attacks targeted the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceylan (BTC) pipeline in 2008,[49] potentially a signal to Russia, a rival oil supplier. Furthermore, contemporary US and European policy has supported the arming of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the People's Protection Units (YPG), which have been recognised as the PKK's Syrian offshoots, in the fight against Islamic State.[50]

These developments exemplify the transformation of the PKK into a key stakeholder within the region. This has clear foreign policy repercussions on countries with regional interests, meaning that their interventions against the PKK's diasporic activities have arguably been reluctant at best. Former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, for example, was accused of allowing PKK organisations to continue fundraising in return for not committing acts of violence in Germany.[51] Such examples indicate that state sponsorship has been substituted by a more indirect *laissez-faire* approach, where states deliberately ignore PKK-affiliated activities due to their indirect impact on achieving their own regional interests. Overall, state-led efforts against the PKK have often lacked concrete intentions and have generally not been meaningful or successful. Comprehensive prevention strategies, therefore, are unlikely to originate from state institutions.

Law enforcement responses in Europe

Turkey has tended to adopt a realist foreign policy approach that is conscious of external threats to its unity and stability.[52] As a result, it has frequently criticised Europe's lacklustre approach towards the

PKK.[53] European foreign policy, however, remains comparatively liberal, considering independent organisations as party to the policymaking process and thus creating favourable conditions for PKK-affiliated lobbying efforts.[54]

Despite Turkey's accusations, overseas responses to PKK activities have not been entirely futile. The UK, France and Belgium have all occasionally conducted joint police operations, most notably Sputnik in 1996 and Sputnik II in 2002, against the PKK's drug smuggling rings and TV stations.[55] However, the number of arrests and prosecutions for terrorist fundraising offences in general have been notably low, with only 62 persons in the U.K. being charged between 2001 and 2017 overall.[56]

The transnational nature of the PKK's criminal operations requires an equally transnational response.[57] However, without full and genuine state commitment, such an approach is unlikely. Therefore, local-level alternatives implemented by non-state institutions are potentially more feasible. Community-wide approaches have been devised against organised crime in the past, for example Sicily's grassroots *"Addiopizzo"* ("Good-bye extortion money") campaign aiming to counter Italian mafia extortion through a union of business owners. This movement used city-wide sticker campaigns as a demonstration of unity and "cultural revolution" against the mafia.[58] Such campaigns demonstrate the potential for softer, community-led responses, potentially with greater preventative power than half-hearted state responses. This paper aims to explore this possibility further.

Devising community-led preventative approaches

While community-led approaches may lack law enforcement capabilities, they hold certain advantages that, if implemented well, can be particularly effective. This is possible given the closer communal and cultural bonds that victims and perpetrators inevitably share as part of the same tightly knit diaspora. Given these ties, communities are likely to be more knowledgeable on both the underlying motives of criminals, as well as their rational offending considerations, making them a natural and considerable source of human intelligence (HUMINT).

Underlying criminal motives and rational considerations correspond to two behavioural economic systems used to model routine decision-making, known as "system 1" and "system 2."[59] System 1 involves intuitive, automatic and unconscious decisions, shaped by emotional reactions and value judgements.[60] System 2 is more rational, involving controlled decision-making based on calculations to obtain the best possible outcomes, oftentimes overriding system 1-based impulsivity.[61] These systems are a part of Kahneman's dual system theory,[62] which has increasingly been studied in the context of criminology to explain the different levels of impulsivity and self-control that criminals exercise for different crime types and scenarios.[63]

Crime prevention strategies targeting system 2-induced offending include situational crime prevention (SCP), which focuses on reducing criminal opportunities.[64] Based on scientific perspectives such as rational choice and routine activity, the framework aims to counter the presence of willing offenders, suitable targets and/or the absence of capable guardians by altering immediate environmental attributes.[65] An abstract example of SCP is metal detectors at airports. The importance of situational factors is also addressed in crime pattern analysis, which considers both criminals and targets to have activity and awareness spaces formed on the basis of their daily routines.[66]

This theory suggests that familiar areas frequented by lots of likely offenders and suitable targets, particularly locations ("nodes") of importance, are likely to become crime hotspots. This is particularly true for tightly knit communities targeted by the PKK. Kochan, for example, noted that serial PKK extortion was concentrated almost on one prominent street in North London, namely Green Lanes in Haringey, which boasts a number of Turkish and Kurdish businesses and restaurants[67]—indicating a clustered pool of exploitable targets for extortion and other financing activities.

By altering situational factors in high-risk areas, interventions can increase the risks, efforts and costs of PKK activities while reducing their rewards and excuses. However, particularly for terrorist groups invoking the emotional sentiments of their supporters, prevention strategies affecting system 2 decision-making alone are insufficient. By maintaining political goals alongside their large-scale

profit-motivated organised crime, the PKK invokes emotive stimulants to maintain offender loyalty and victim compliance with their financing efforts.[68] Their activities therefore involve emotive considerations, rather than pure rational choice alone. The implication of this is that, even if a certain situational opportunity for crime is prevented, the underlying ideological drive to commit said crime would induce "displacement," namely the commission of the same crime elsewhere where an SCP intervention is absent.[69] Since it would be impractical to implement SCP interventions in all circumstances, this exposes the main limitation of solely implementing system 2-based strategies to counter emotionally or politically charged offences such as terrorist financing.

This exemplifies the need to couple measures such as SCP with system 1-centric ones. As a solution, "Nudge" theory proposed Thaler and Sunstein argues that it is possible to rearrange peoples' "choice architecture," namely how possible choices are perceived by individuals, to subconsciously encourage prosocial decision-making.[70] This involves subtle interventions that, while preserving freedom of choice, encourage better decisions without making the "nudge" immediately obvious.[71] They can be as simple as placing healthier food closer to eye-level on a supermarket counter, inciting increased purchases, a "nudge" that has scientifically been shown to yield results (amongst many others) within the field of behavioural economics.[72]

Initially aimed at bettering lifestyle and health choices, "Nudge" has also been applied to crime prevention. In their pilot study attempting to reduce vehicle theft, Roach *et al.* used leaflets, a nominal SCP approach, to "nudge" victims into securing their vehicles.[73] The "nudge" was not the presence of the leaflet itself, but their content, which intuitively encouraged recipients to make better choices. Despite their theoretical differences (such as "nudge" preserving the "freedom to offend" while SCP often aiming to physically prevent it), this example shows that the two theories can (and perhaps should more often) complement each other.

In this light, eight such measures, with possible nudge compatibilities, were identified from the list of 25 SCP techniques published by Cornish and Clarke for evaluation.[74] These refrained from including physical interventions that most SCP techniques adopt, such as metal detectors or street lighting. Instead, "softer" approaches, such as poster campaigns and neighbourhood watches were prioritised due to their ability to host underlying nudges, such as subliminal messages. For comparative purposes, one "hard" measure (CCTV cameras) was included. Chosen proposals are shown in Table 1.

Research objectives

This research has two key aims. The first is to provide a comprehensive insight, through first-hand surveys and interviews, of the PKK's terrorist financing and support activities in North London. In so doing, this paper hopes to shed light on how PKK activities affect the community and wider stakeholders, such as local politicians and businesses.

Table 1. Eight proposed SCP+Nudge measures to counter PKK diaspora activities.

Category	Technique	Application to the PKK (as presented in surveys)
Remove excuses	Alert conscience	Preventative posters that alert the conscience and remove excuses
	Set rules	Set rules on harassment and public conduct to limit activities
Reduce provocations	Neutralise peer pressure	Effective propaganda to counter peer pressure-induced PKK activism
	Avoid disputes	Stopping events (e.g., protests) that provoke disputes and further activism
Reduce rewards	Disrupt markets	Take legal action against PKK-supporting firms and organisations to limit their capabilities
Increase risks	Extend guardianship	Community schemes & neighbourhood watches to deter PKK activists
	Strengthen formal surveillance	CCTV in shops or hotspots of PKK activism to better identify activists
	Assist natural surveillance	Confidential hotlines for disillusioned activists to share information and seek support

The second is to understand whether community-based SCP interventions, coupled with additional nudge capabilities, would be an effective means of countering these activities. Survey and interview respondents were therefore additionally asked to scrutinise the eight proposed SCP+N measures and to offer feasible implementation strategies. The findings serve as a preliminary assessment of the applicability of SCP+N to wider contexts.

Methodology

Design

Surveys and interviews took place between July 4th and August 4th, 2018. Surveys were conducted anonymously both physically in the community and online. They were formed of four sections, namely respondent attributes, past encounters, opinions on existing prevention measures and perceived effectiveness of the 8 proposed measures. Table 2 shows an overview of the survey design and data collected in each section.

Table 2. Overview of data collected during surveys.

Section	Data collected
Respondent attributes	Age
	Years/area of residence in the UK
	Level of community engagement
	Perception of PKK activities
Past encounters	Locations of PKK activities
	Types of PKK activities encountered between 2017–18
	Typical number of activists and levels of PKK branding encountered
	Attributes affecting victimisation
Opinions on existing prevention measures	Whether activities were reported to the police (and reasons for not doing so)
	Responsibility/effectiveness of entities countering PKK diasporic activities
Perceived effectiveness	Perceived effectiveness of the proposed countermeasures

Interviews involved in-depth semi-structured discussions with community leaders and past victims of PKK activities. The four talking points included the nature of encounters with the PKK, potential points of intervention, effectiveness of current prevention methods and an evaluation of proposed measures.

Materials

Surveys and accompanying information sheets were available for completion (in English and Turkish) both manually and online. Interviews were accompanied by a three-page information document and two identical consent forms, to be signed and kept by the interviewee and the researcher.

Ethics and bias considerations

Both the surveys and interviews were conducted on sensitive topics (terrorist financing victimisation) and within communities where surveying for such information was deemed high risk. In such circumstances, considerations ranging from how questions are phrased to managing risk of emotional distress are all important. Both surveys and interviews were based on ethics considerations and limitations to confidentiality, adherent to the British Society of Criminology statement of ethics,[75] including the condition that respondents must have reported any financial crimes that they disclosed to the authorities if they wished their identity to remain concealed. Safe community events (for physical surveys) and secure locations for interviews were chosen to reduce risks of intimidation or sabotage attempts by PKK sympathisers. All considerations, including a risk assessment, were submitted for data protection registration and ethics approval, consequently approved by the University College London (UCL) Data Protection Office and UCL High-Risk Research Ethics Committee respectively.

All survey screening questions (asking about victimisation under different circumstances, such as PKK-related drug trafficking or extortion) were phrased to be as neutral as possible, with examples, to not bias responses or invoke emotive reactions. Per United Nations guidance on crime victimisation surveys,[76] questions also involved asking for the frequency of victim interaction with crime events in order to increase the accuracy of crime prevalence estimations. Question ordering, another important issue in crime surveys given the possible unfamiliarity of respondents with certain types of crimes being questioned,[77] was also constructed so that opinions about crime prevention came at the end. This was to ensure that respondents had a thorough understanding (per previous questions on frequency of encounters) of the terrorist financing crimes and propaganda activities that the survey sought to address. No ethics issues or respondent distress occurred throughout the collection of surveys.

For similar reasons surrounding sensitivity, interviews were also conducted with specific considerations.[78] Firstly, provisions were made in case of emotional distress when recounting trauma, including a diversion to lighter topics and a termination of the interview shortly after. Efforts were made, based on law enforcement-informed advice on interviewing crime victims, to avoid excessive questioning, maintain a light and friendly tone throughout, constantly allow victims to voice any safety or emotional concerns they have and prioritise open questions to allow victims to tell their story.[79] Anxiety inducing language and dominance were avoided, particularly based on the association with such approaches to crime victims omitting information in police interviews.[80] No ethical concerns or issues occurred throughout any interviews.

The nature of the research topic itself is, without doubt, highly political and thus subject to a degree of bias, particularly given the anti-PKK nature of the respondents to both surveys and interviews. In this light, data collection, while a "technical exercise," is inherently political itself,[81] requiring important considerations to mitigate the bias that they may very well yield in their results. Such bias, given anti-PKK sentiment, may include overreporting of encountered PKK activities in surveys and/or the overexaggerating of encounters discussed in interviews, meaning that the results of the consulted sample are non-representative and cannot be generalised.[82]

To limit these biases as much as possible, no suggestive questions were asked regarding the interviewees' political thoughts on the PKK's practices, but rather more abstract questions on the prevalence and nature of their activities. Interviewee and survey anonymity was stressed constantly to ensure maximum comfort and privacy. Throughout interviews, it became apparent that most, if not all of interviewees portrayed less bias than feared against the PKK, as being in the same community for a prolonged period of time had given them an acknowledgement of pro-PKK thought processes and perspectives (even if disagreement was evident). A number of interviewees even suggested putting the researchers in touch with pro-PKK activists for interview, though ethics approval did not cover such a possibility, as the next subsection on participants will indicate.

Participants

For ethics, security, access and practicality reasons, both studies aimed to gauge the perspective of *victims* of the PKK's overseas activities and not the PKK's supporters themselves. Homogenous sampling of individuals from the UK's Turkish or Kurdish diaspora, with no obvious PKK sympathies, was utilised for surveys. In total, 73 respondents (31 males and 42 females) were surveyed, aged between 20 and 78 (M = 43.59, SD = 12.72) and with between 1 and 48 years of residency in the U.K. (M = 19.49, SD = 10.73). On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very), respondents rated their level of community engagement at an average of 3.42 (SD = 1.16). Respondents hailed from 18 of the 32 boroughs of London (N = 69) and Surrey, Hertfordshire, Brighton and Essex (N = 1 each).

Homogenous sampling was also used for interviews. Thirteen interviewees (7 males and 6 females) were approached if they had been a victim to the PKK's activities (N = 2), if they were community leaders aware of said activities (N = 7), or both (N = 4). Interviewees were aged between 38 and 85 (M = 54.92, SD = 12.71). Both survey and interviewee respondents were older than the average age of Turkey (32.8 as of 2020) and[83] London (35.6 as of 2019).[84] They were particularly older than the

typical age of the population in south-eastern Turkey, from which much of the diaspora originates, which had an average age of around 20–21 in 2014 (exact figures are unavailable given the lack of definitive regional borders).[85] Four of the 13 interviewees were identified by snowballing (recommended by other interviewees).

Survey conduct

Typical surveys generally involve a large number of respondents, based on a representative sample of the population being studied. However, per ethics considerations discussed previously, only a limited non-representative sample could be consulted. This is not uncommon given the circumstances, particularly when a study in a high-risk field is intended to be exploratory. Small sample studies have been noted to be advantageous (in fields such as clinical trials of possible treatments) for initial consultation, to assess whether significant time commitment, financial investment and levels of risk are sufficient for a more comprehensive follow-up study.[86] In other words, small sample surveys such as the current study are beneficial for determining the existence of concepts, rather than their statistical magnitude. Coupled with this, studies by Kareev and Fiedler[87] propose that non-proportional sampling, though not ideal, can allow for a more active identification of concepts when the consulted sample is small, given the likelihood of the consulted participants to be better versed in the topics subject to questioning.

In recognition of the low sample size, no statistical tests were performed in this study, with survey results being used only to complement the more comprehensive interview data. The supplementation of surveys in the current study by interviews, which provided a better understanding of the topics surveyed, was therefore beneficial to overcome the negative externalities of such a circumstantially limited surveying approach.

Of the 73 surveys, 28 were completed manually and 45 online. They both consisted of the same 25 questions and took an average of 11 minutes to complete. The researcher was present for clarification purposes during the completion of manual surveys.

Interview procedure and thematic analysis

Interviews typically lasted between 25 minutes and 1 hour, though two lasted approximately 4 hours. Due to topic sensitivity, interviews were not recorded. Interview notes were transcribed soon after they concluded. Vital quotes were transcribed exactly and translated from Turkish to English for inclusion in the results section. Since the issues discussed were largely based on practical experiences rather than complex theoretical concepts, responses were clear and lacked ambiguity.

Coding was completed manually to prevent omissions. Although transcripts were anonymised, their sensitivity prevented their distribution beyond the primary data collector. Inter-rater reliability could therefore not be tested. Analytic induction was used to uncover information on key themes, namely modus operandi, offender profiles, victim profiles, current effectiveness of preventative institutions and views on the proposed countermeasures. The interviews uncovered detailed information about PKK activities and feasible implementation strategies for the countermeasures proposed. In the results below, survey data will be presented in charts, accompanied by interviewee accounts.

An overview of the PKK in London since the 1980s

Human smuggling and "feudal" control

The PKK's overseas activities began with large-scale human smuggling operations that led to the creation of large diasporas. Capitalising on (self-inflicted) unrest in south-eastern Turkey, the PKK orchestrated the movement of many Kurdish families to the U.K. from 1988 onwards, which granted them asylum. One interviewee recounted the PKK's human smuggling operations as follows:

> Victims of PKK human smuggling arrived largely helpless. They were often scared that their asylum would be revoked at any time, had no knowledge of English and were reliant on the PKK for asylum-related legal assistance. Law firms would provide substantial commission for every victim the PKK provided. The PKK gave these clients a fabricated backstory to use for their asylum application.

With their legal affairs firmly in the hands of the PKK and without any knowledge of English or financial savings to sustain their new life, migrants were entirely reliant on the PKK for jobs and accommodation. They therefore had no option but to abide by their authority, as any attempts to "leave" the community would result in a lack of options or assistance. In 1988, a PKK-affiliated organisation was established in North London to find migrants illicit employment in factories. In return, the PKK extorted a portion of their wages. One interviewee described the emerging community as a "feudal system" with barriers to exit, tightly controlled and exploited by the PKK. Interviewees described the U.K. response as largely indifferent to developments and often generous when granting asylum.

The PKK began consolidating their "feudal" control in the 1990s. Since their own legal situation was precarious, migrants relied on the PKK (rather than the police) to provide authority and solve community disputes, as one interviewee described as below.

> A supporter who believed that they had been wronged, cheated or scammed could ask the organisation for assistance. Through unknown means, most probably through mafia connections, the organisation was somehow able to retrieve the entire amount of money, accurate to the penny, back from the perpetrator. The PKK made large profits from commissions from such jobs.

The PKK's dispute-resolution services were coupled also by enforcement, imposing their own punishments on defiant individuals. Three interviewees described the process of sham "courts," held by the PKK, with rulings legitimised by intense community pressure to accept them and punishments for "speaking out of line." Some of the PKK's punishment methods were described as below.

> For example, they [the PKK] often physically assault those they find 'guilty' in open areas with no witnesses, such as parks at night, and inflict violence until the ambulance arrives, leaving their victim on the pavement. They also have makeshift cells in one of their associations where they forcibly imprison their victims. Some reasons for such treatment include earning money outside the knowledge of the PKK and failing to declare the source of the income.

The PKK also employed other methods of maintaining order and control over the community. One interviewee recounted how the PKK often forced migrants to commit crimes on their behalf, or even forcibly recruited them for terrorism in south-eastern Turkey as a form of compulsory "military service," as another interviewee describes:

> The PKK established a means of preventing anyone from leaving their sphere of influence. An example is, when a family's child has been forced to fight for the PKK. The family is then reliant on the PKK for information on their child's status and to guarantee their safe return.

In light of their authority over the diaspora, the PKK's antics were described as a "parallel state" within North London, with authority deriving from intense community pressure and the lack of alternative sources of assistance. Nevertheless, their feudal hold over the community saw growing resentment in the early 1990s, leading to a progressive change in tactics. These are discussed in the next section.

Contemporary activities

Interviewees identified the 1990s-2000s as a period of change in the PKK's *modi operandi*, which they overall attributed to three main reasons. The first was due to the growing levels of dissent within the community against the PKK's feudal system. The second was the rise of a second generation of migrants, educated in British schools and un-reliant on the PKK's services. The third was that a political movement affiliated with the PKK gained parliamentary representation in the 2007 Turkish general election, carrying the PKK's aims into the political sphere.
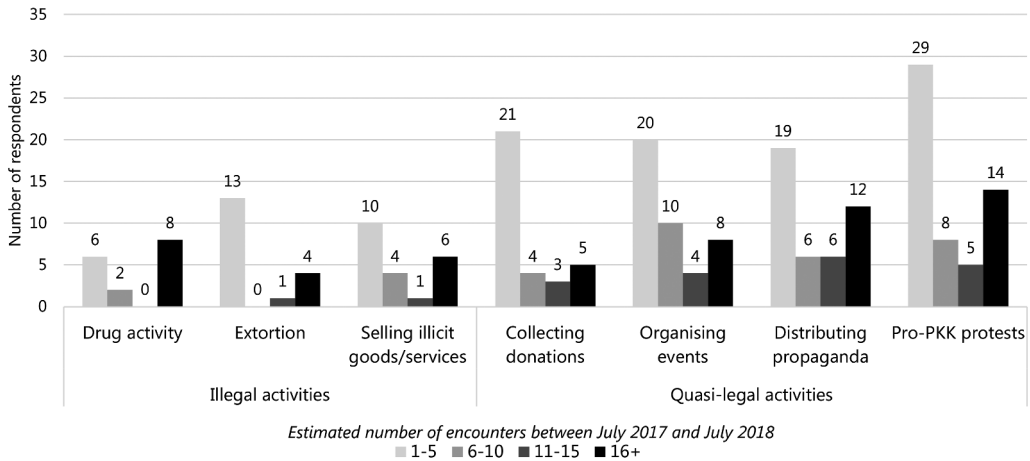
Figure 2. Types and estimated number of PKK activities observed by survey respondents (July 2017-July 2018), (*N* = 58).

The PKK responded by abandoning their overt community control strategy in the mid 1990s, while also adopting a public relations aspect, which still remains their prevailing *modus operandi* today. Nevertheless, the PKK's overall diaspora activities have not become less problematic; on a 1–5 Likert scale, survey respondents scored the scale of the problem at an average of 4.58 (*N* = 72, *SD* = 0.77), with 70.8 percent answering with a "5" (very problematic). 43.9 percent said that their activities had become more problematic over the years, with 37.9 percent indicating no change and 18.2 percent stating that they had become less problematic (*N* = 66).

The PKK's prioritisation of public relations led to a relative shift from "illegal activities" (such as extortion) to "quasi-legal" activities, such as donation collection and holding events. Figure 2 shows the type and estimated number of PKK activists encountered by survey respondents. Though "quasi-illegal" activities were encountered more frequently, interviewees still provided many accounts of outrightly illegal activities, elaborated in the next section.

Illegal activities

Extortion

A typical PKK extortion scheme would involve operatives entering stores, weddings, funerals or other forms of communal gatherings to collect extortion money, which they called "solidarity donations" or "taxes." One interviewee recounted the typical interaction as follows.

> They would use arguments such as, *'look at you, doing business and enjoying yourself in a first world country thanks to us. Meanwhile, our fighters are dying while fighting for your ethnic rights in harsh mountainous conditions.'* It has become so normalised now that eventually victims just give money automatically.

One business-owning interviewee recounted the repercussions of not complying with extortion demands by detailing numerous court cases brought against him via his many employees, some of which were PKK sympathisers or were coerced into suing their employer. Cases, which included workplace discrimination, financial disputes or accusations of violence, caused poor publicity and commercial interests to suffer, even though they eventually concluded in the interviewee's favour. The same interviewee recounted being a victim of PKK vandalism and defamatory news stories in local media.

In light of a greater emphasis on public relations, "extortions" became less coercive, with PKK operatives turning to selling memorabilia in return for "donations" instead. One interviewee noted

that a typical "donation," made in return for calendars and photographs of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, made offenders up to £200.

Violent raids

Interviewees recounted numerous instances where PKK activism turned violent. One recounted how the PKK would routinely raid the shop of an associate who supported the Turkish right-wing Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Two other interviewees recounted how 30 pro-PKK activists once led a midnight raid of a Turkish cultural centre in central London:

> Before the raid, they ensured that there was nobody inside the buildings. They later broke in and caused damage to windows and furniture inside. The activists also threw colourful gas canisters, similar to those seen during football or protests, inside the building.

Interviewees noted that such violent events followed significant political developments against the PKK in Turkey. The particular raid described above was attributed to the arrest of Selahattin Demirtaş, the former co-leader of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which is alleged to have affiliations with the PKK.

Earlier raids described by interviewees included violent attacks on the Turkish Embassy in London and the occupation of the Greek Embassy following Abdullah Öcalan's capture in 1999, leading to numerous arrests. Other raids included occupations of the London branches of Turkish Airlines, Turkey's *Ziraat Bank* and *Hürriyet* newspaper in the 1990s.[88] Also in 1999, a meeting of the Turkish Textile Industry Development Association (TİDA), aiming to raise aid for the deadly earthquake in İzmit (an industrial city east of İstanbul) and attended by the Turkish Ambassador and Consul-General to London, was attacked.[89] During the 2000s, molotov cocktail attacks against *Ziraat Bank* and Cyprus Turkish Bank by PKK activists were also documented,[90] along with occupations of the *London Eye* and the London offices of the European Commission.[91] During a visit to Downing Street in 2016, Turkish then-Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu had to be escorted out of a backdoor due to violent pro-PKK protests occupying Whitehall, leading to the U.K. Government expressing "regret" at the incident.[92]

Drug offences

In terms of drug-related offences, two interviewees claimed that distribution and subsequent money laundering was conducted through a number of off-licenses and restaurants in North London, many of which were coerced by the PKK. The PKK's drug operations were fronted by two North London-based gangs, namely the *Bombers* and the *Tottenham Boys*, both of which were looked after by wealthy businessmen in the tobacco industry that required the PKK's support (given their control of illicit tobacco trafficking routes in the Middle East) to do business.[93]

Quasi-legal activities

Lobbying efforts

The PKK's wider public relations strategy revolved around forming organisations, including think tanks working closely with British politicians, that held events and conducted their operations under the guise of "human rights" causes. One interviewee recounted how, when he was the head of a pro-Turkish organisation, he received a large book jointly written by the PKK and Armenian organisations and distributed to members of the European Parliament, claiming to document Turkish "crimes against humanity."

These organisations fronted the PKK's lobbying of British politicians, who were widely receptive to their efforts. 56.1 percent of survey respondents claimed to have observed U.K. politicians at PKK-affiliated events. One interviewee described how she had sent letters of complaint to the U.K. Labour Party about North London MPs, though action was muted.

Using their influence among U.K. decision-makers, the PKK (disguised as "non-partisan" groups) also aimed to lobby opposition Turkish politicians. Turkey's founding centre-left party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), was particularly targeted. This was to expand the appeal of PKK-affiliated organisations, while also increasing their own legitimacy by positioning themselves as "allied" with Turkey's main opposition. One interviewee, who used to lead a prominent Turkish NGO in the community, recounted an ordeal as follows.

> The PKK's organisations tend to hide their affiliation and instead promote themselves on the basis of 'human rights' or impartiality, allowing them to almost fool some high-profile invitees that have no affiliation with the PKK to attend their events. On one occasion, a CHP MP, on a London visit, whom I was supposed to meet for dinner, failed to turn up until 11pm. When he arrived, it turned out that he had been spending time at a pro-PKK think tank.

Another area of concern were academic settings. Two interviewees recounted how pro-PKK student societies would frequently host stalls or events in support of the PKK, while also disrupting Turkish events or academic conferences. One interviewee, an academic often working with the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), noted that images of Abdullah Öcalan and those killed while fighting for the PKK's Syrian offshoot (PYD), were frequently observed on the university walls and noticeboards.

Religious exploitation

The PKK's Marxist origins originally made it sceptical of religion and religious organisations. Indeed, *Cemevi*s, the place of worship for Alevi Muslims (to which much of the Turkish and Kurdish diaspora subscribes) were a core source of contention for the PKK. In 1992, a number of Alevi migrants sought to establish a Cemevi to counter the PKK's oppressive tactics. Despite the PKK's opposition, a Cemevi was opened, with an interviewee recounting the subsequent events as follows.

> As a result of either legal or communal agreements, the Cemevi and the PKK signed a protocol that ended extortion of Cemevi members. The basis of the protocol was that Alevism was fundamentally opposed to religious, ethnic or any other form of discrimination, unlike the PKK, which was essentially based on ethnic cohesion. Thereon, Cemevi members could present their receipt of monthly dues when PKK operatives demanded extortion and be exempted from forced payments.

The rise of Cemevis and Alevism as an opposing force to the PKK's ethno-separatist ideals was notably the first successful community-based opposition to the PKK. Although the PKK initially accepted the Cemevis, they soon saw an opportunity to gain control and manipulate them, essentially themselves fulfilling their original argument that religion was a manipulable force (or "opium of the people"). Initially unsuccessfully attempting to gain control through entryism and fielding their own Cemevi executive committee candidates during annual general meetings (AGMs), the PKK eventually conducted a physical raid against the Cemevi in Stoke Newington in 2007. Despite several legal battles that the PKK eventually lost, they continued manipulating Alevi ideals for their own political goals by opening or taking over many other "Alevi" organisations. An interviewee, themselves Alevi, described the situation as below.

> These PKK entities, disguised as 'Alevi' associations, begin imposing their political and PKK-sympathetic views on children from kindergarten onwards. Most people go to these associations because they are Alevi, need religious guidance or a place to socialise. They are unaware of what their children are subject to when they leave them there for classes.

One interviewee mentioned that the PKK also formed an alliance in the late 2000s with the movement of self-proclaimed religious cleric Fethullah Gülen (since proscribed in Turkey under the name "Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation," or "FETÖ"). At the time, Gülen's supporters were highly influential in Turkish state bureaucracy, holding events and conferences together with PKK-sympathetic groups in London.

NGO capture and political entryism

Alevi organisations are not the only victims of PKK entryism or forced takeover. Many other NGOs in London have also been targeted, with the PKK often signing up sympathetic members just before AGMs to maximise their voting power for electing a sympathetic executive. One interviewee, who was president of a political association before it was taken over by a PKK-sympathetic group, recounted the PKK's strategy as follows.

> The PKK is very effective in taking over NGOs and associations that it deems either a threat or effective for promoting their cause. They did this by causing internal problems and launching campaigns of defamation against NGO leaders that it aimed to eradicate. The aim was to force them to give in, since the PKK affiliates are most often richer, have more supporters throughout the community, have more time and are more committed. This means that any association that falls to the PKK once is unlikely to be rescued again.

The main reasons behind the PKK's aim to take over rival NGOs were threefold. The first was to prevent them from becoming notable rivals within the community. The second was to gain access to their membership and promote PKK ideals, much like the case of Alevi organisations. The third was to co-opt these NGOs to hold joint events with PKK groups to legitimise their cause. One interviewee noted that the PKK would often provide offices and accommodation to their "puppet" organisations to remain aware of their activities.

The PKK also aimed to "hijack" several protests and events in the community to effectively take "ownership" of an issue with widespread political support, thereby legitimising themselves. An interviewee recounted two examples, namely the London sympathy march for the 2013 Turkish anti-government "Gezi Park" protests and the 2015 march against ISIS terrorism following the 10 October Ankara terror attacks. In both cases, PKK operatives swarmed the marches with PKK banners and signs "in a pre-planned and organised manner" despite previous community agreements banning political flags.

Another victim of entryism were U.K. political parties. Interviewees accused the PKK of using their influence to field their own candidates in local and general elections in North London wards and constituencies. Indeed, a number of North London councillors, some of which held senior council positions, have portrayed pro-PKK sympathies, including being speakers at "Freedom for Öcalan" events. One interviewee mentioned a particular encounter with a pro-PKK activist-turned-councillor as below.

> During an official event attended by HDP [Peoples' Democratic Party] MPs from Turkey, one individual branded PKK-critics as 'fascists'. After we complained, she made threats to our lives. When the [2018 U.K. local council] election arrived and she became a candidate, she offered to make a personal apology, but I refused to meet her. She went on to be elected a councillor and serve a term as Mayor.

Hotspots of exploitation

Survey respondents were asked where they encountered PKK activities such as those described above. Events (such as weddings and funerals) and open spaces were most commonly mentioned as environments where both fundraising and propaganda activities were observed. These were followed by shops, restaurants and political events. Activities in academic institutions were cited the least. Both fundraising and propaganda activities were reported with similar frequencies across all the environments consulted, though propaganda activities were encountered somewhat more commonly.

Much of these activities occurred in either Central London (where protests and activism in universities are common) or, mostly, in North London. Figure 3 shows the level of PKK activity encountered in London boroughs and wards. The findings demonstrated the tightly knit nature of the PKK's offences, confined mostly to four North London boroughs and wards containing significant high streets with extortion-prone diaspora establishments.
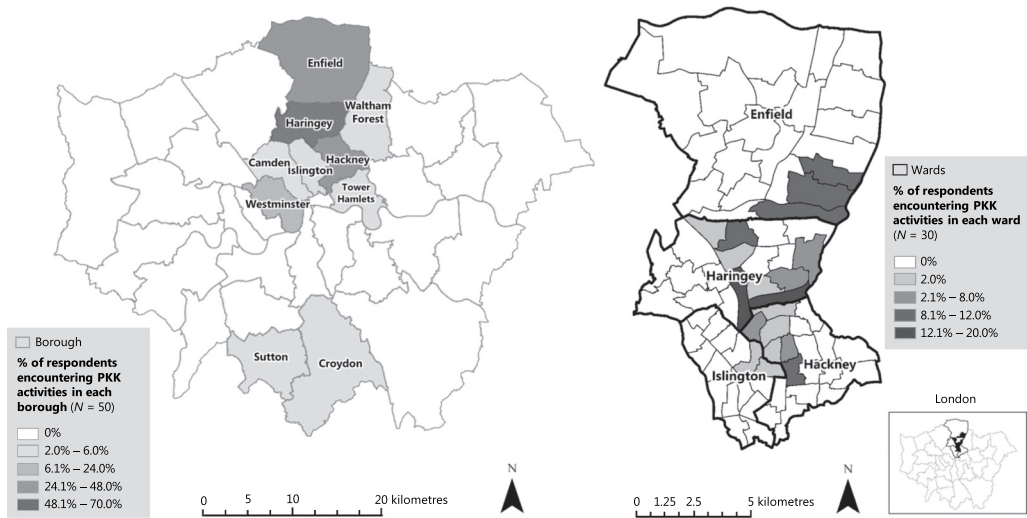
Figure 3. Percentage of survey respondents encountering PKK activities by London borough (left) and by ward in the London boroughs of Enfield, Hackney, Haringey and Islington (right).

Victim profiles

As community criticism of their feudal authority grew, the PKK became more selective over their targets. Instead of a blanket approach across the whole community, they began only targeting supporters. One interviewee described how the PKK, given the community's tightly knit nature, would know about any new arrival almost instantly. Another interviewee, originally from western Turkey (away from the PKK's main area of operation) described an encounter with PKK operatives as below.

> They know everyone – where they're from, what they do for a living and what religion and ethnicity they are. They target only those who they know are sympathetic to them and those who come from eastern Turkey. When one activist asked me for a donation, their accomplice warned him and said, 'he's from the west. He has nothing to do with us.'

In some cases, however, the PKK did victimise non-Kurdish individuals if they held a particular financial or political position that was of interest to the PKK. These included supporters of rival (Turkish nationalist) political parties, pro-Turkish NGOs and wealthy business owners. Defamation, violent raids and baseless legal action were identified as the key methods used against these individuals. Survey respondents largely confirmed the PKK's ethno-political prioritisation of victims, with their 1–5 Likert scale influence rankings of different victim attributes shown in Figure 4, ordered by mean score (provided in brackets).

Offender profiles

Interviewees identified three distinct forms of PKK offenders in the diaspora. The first, namely ringleaders, were individuals who orchestrated and oversaw the PKK's operations. Many were active in the PKK for financial rather than political reasons, with several deserting the PKK after becoming wealthy from their criminal activities.

The second were activists, often at lower ranks with political rather than financial incentives. Activists typically collect donations, organise pro-PKK events and disrupt rival activities. The consensus amongst interviewees was that such activists were often provocative, undeterred by possible legal action and largely unaware that their activism mainly served the financial interests of organised criminal ringleaders. Interviewees that were part of a Turkish cultural centre raided by such
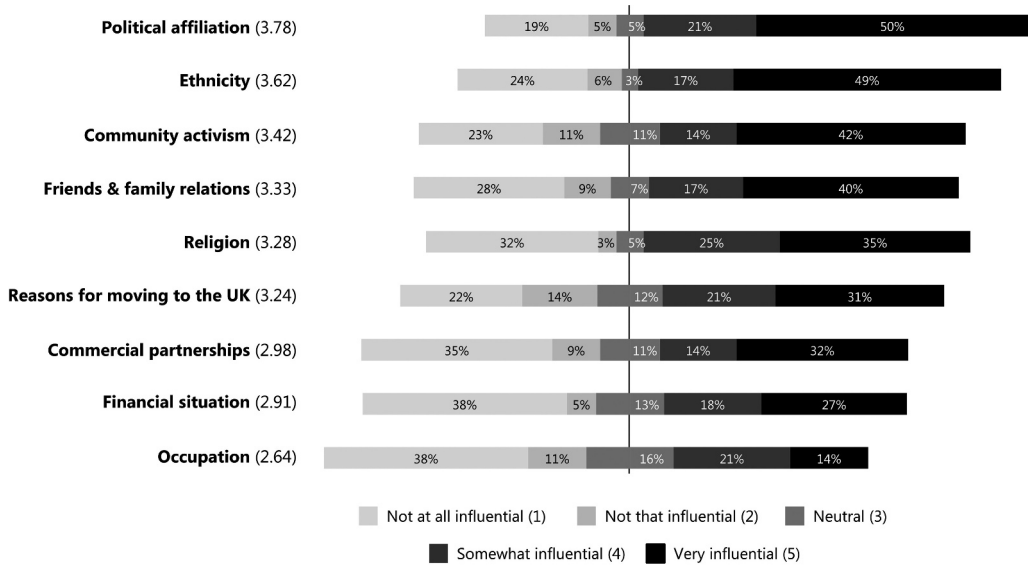
Figure 4. Level of influence of personal and societal attributes on chances of PKK victimisation. Numbers in brackets represent mean scores (/5).

individuals, mentioned previously, noted that the mob in question was in no rush to leave the vicinity after the raid and openly showed their faces despite the presence of CCTV. Many filmed the raid, while shouting pro-PKK slogans, and broadcasted live to their social media accounts.

The third group of offenders, namely coerced actors, were the most contentious. These actors are bound to the PKK for reasons such as asylum applications, accommodation or employment, and are coerced to commit crimes on the PKK's behalf. Thus, they can be considered both offenders and victims. An example of such an individual was described by an interviewee as below.

> One day, a very close employee of mine was approached by the PKK and was coerced into opening a lawsuit against me for 'religious discrimination'. The PKK told him that if he didn't do it, they would harm his extended family in Turkey. He was so scared that he fled back to Turkey.'

Survey respondents tended to encounter the second type of offender (activists) the most, reporting that they often appeared in large groups (for both fundraising and propaganda) and often openly displayed their PKK affiliations. Of respondents, 50 percent observed outright PKK branding, which is illegal under the U.K. 2000 Terrorism Act. However, 55 percent observed PKK-affiliated organisation branding, and it may be the case that some respondents were not able to differentiate between them. Another 11 percent observed no identifying features. In general, survey respondents reported that PKK groups conducting propaganda activities tended to be somewhat larger than fundraising groups.

When asked about repeat victimisation, respondents were divided; 17.9 percent and 14.3 percent recounted seeing the same activist(s) very and somewhat frequently respectively, while 28.6 percent said they never re-encountered the same activist(s). Another 28.6 percent responded "neutral," indicating that they were not sure, while 10.7 percent said that repeat encounters were infrequent ($N = 56$).

Overall, offender disregard for concealing their activities appears to have been bolstered by the indifference of preventative institutions, a key issue of concern for both interviewees and survey respondents. Criticisms and survey assessments of prevention measures will be reported in the next section.

Perception of existing countermeasures

Interviews and surveys focused on three entities potentially capable of preventing PKK activity, namely police, Turkish diplomatic services and community organisations. Most interviewees were able to recount instances of police failure in preventing PKK activities. One described how an acquaintance caught two PKK extortionists on CCTV, but they were set free without any legal consequences. Another described how police officers who were themselves of PKK-sympathetic origin often openly sided with PKK activists during altercations. Similar experiences led survey respondents to have predominantly negative views of the police, with only 6.6 percent admitting to reporting PKK activities upon sighting them ($N = 61$). The vast majority did not due to their own experiences of police indifference.

Diplomatic services received similarly negative views, though this was mainly attributed to interviewees largely being unaware of their activities. One interviewee mentioned receiving a well-intentioned call from the mission after unknowingly associating with PKK operatives while running a pro-Turkish community organisation. Suggested courses of action for diplomatic services involved supporting and protecting anti-PKK lobby groups amongst the community.

Perceptions of community organisations were less negative, yet still low. Many interviewees admitted that few organisations were strong enough to match the funding, devotion, support and resources of their pro-PKK adversaries. The perceived current effectiveness of police, diplomatic services and community organisations by survey respondents are shown in Figure 5 (shown due to its significance to the prevention-oriented focus of the study), with mean scores (/5) shown in brackets beside each entity.

Perceived effectiveness of proposed measures

Survey respondents were asked to rate on a 1 (not at all) to 5 (very) Likert scale their perceived effectiveness of the eight proposed countermeasures. Interviewees were consulted in more detail, being invited to suggest specific reasons for their effectiveness/ineffectiveness and feasible implementation strategies based on experience. Survey scores (with mean scores in brackets) are shown in Figure 6 (again displayed due to its significance to the prevention-oriented focus of the study), while interviewee suggestions are detailed in Table 3.

Discussion

The insights above paint a bleak picture of the PKK's activities in London, which involve often blatant terrorist financing activities with minimal resistance, all while enjoying widespread support (or at the very least indifference) from the community and local politicians. At face value, theories of rational choice and routine activity explain the PKK's decisions to target closely-knit communities, eliminate
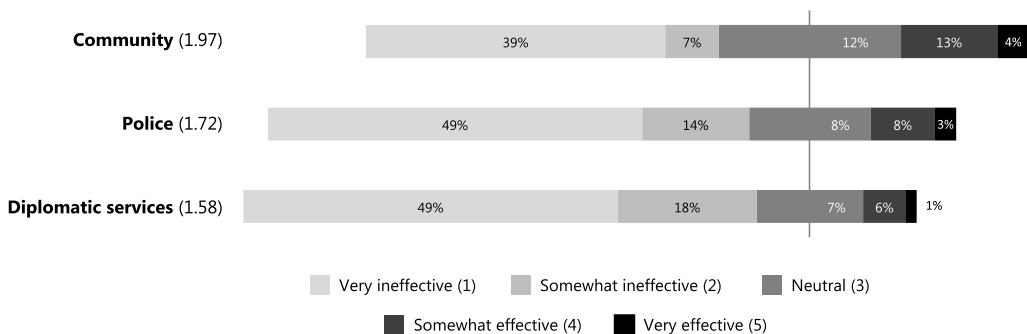
Figure 5. Perceived effectiveness of the diaspora community, police and Turkish diplomatic services in preventing PKK activities ($N = 71$). Numbers in brackets represent mean scores (/5).
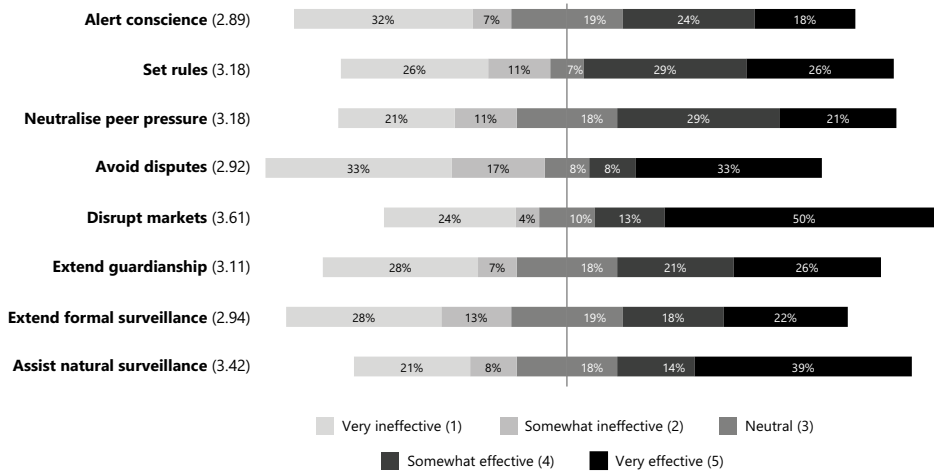
Figure 6. Perceived effectiveness of the proposed countermeasures in preventing PKK activities (*N* = 72). Numbers in brackets represent mean scores (/5).

rival groups and extort either easy targets or those with high financial reward, given the "lack of a capable guardian" (i.e., ineffective law enforcement responses).

However, these theories are insufficient in explaining how community support can be concurrently maintained alongside criminality, as this goes against conventional wisdom that crime-committing entities are looked upon unfavourably by their victims. The section below argues that is it that precise support, arising from successful endeavours to legitimise itself across the community, that allows the PKK to generate itself a low-risk, high-reward pool of terrorist financing opportunities.

Constructing criminal opportunities

Like many other terrorist organisations, the PKK sees a lucrative potential source of funding in the diaspora. This constitutes a *raw* opportunity, in that the overarching potential for criminal rewards is evident but not necessarily immediately obtainable (the costs or risks of apprehension, for example, may be too great or the reward from extorting unemployed victims too little). Therefore, these raw opportunities must be turned into a pool of viable targets, namely exploitable opportunities, to be then taken advantage of.

The PKK sets out to generate these exploitable criminal opportunities for itself by manipulating a common set of situational characteristics in its favour, such as shared ethno-political grievances or demand for jobs and legal services. To do so, the PKK legitimises itself amongst the community by providing these services and portraying itself as fighters for the diaspora's ethnic rights. Additionally, external sympathy is sought (and opposition eliminated) by associating with or hijacking wider causes, NGOs and politicians. These efforts cause victims to become *ideologically sympathetic* to and/or *socially dependent* on the PKK. As a result, the rewards from targeting these victims, or recruiting them as offenders, are increased while risks of being reported and apprehended are reduced. Committing crimes such as extortion consequently start becoming feasible, and hence opportunities for widespread fundraising are activated. The process is summarised in Figure 7.

Ideological sympathy and social dependence can therefore be seen as *legitimisers* of criminal activity. Aims to incite ideological sympathy include the "we are fighting for your rights" mantra and branding of extortion attempts as "solidarity taxes."[94] Attempts to create social dependence include threatening extended families in Turkey, implied threats of losing asylum support and neutralising rival community groups. The powerful, community-wide effect of these legitimisers can

Table 3. Interviewee reception of proposed measures.

| Proposed intervention	Benefits	Drawbacks	Proposed implementation strategies
Alert conscience (preventative posters)	This would challenge widespread support beyond the community, e.g. policymakers	The PKK already enjoys widespread support from U.K. and EU decision-makers, making this ineffective	Posters should: (1) highlight the negatives of ethnic politics, (2) urge research of PKK disinformation, (3) empower Kurdish culture in unifying and apolitical ways and (4) shed light on the PKK's acts of terrorism
Set rules (to limit community exploitation)	None	Already exist but are not enforced (hence emboldening activists) / Can cause backlash based on free speech or protest rights / Can cause crime displacement	Encourage increased reporting/court action to incentivise enforcement / Prioritise "unwritten community rules" that prevent provocations (e.g. the 1990s PKK-Cemevi deal) / Set rules on verifying imams or dedes (Alevi religious leaders) to prevent sham PKK-sympathetic individuals attaining religious legitimacy
Neutralise peer pressure (Propaganda to target peer pressure-induced PKK activism)	Interviewees observed that several of their friends had become sympathetic to the PKK "because their friends support them"	None	Convince schools and law enforcement that peer pressure-induced PKK activism effectively amounts to radicalisation. / Shed light on the PKK's true activities in group settings to prevent peer pressure amongst social groups
Avoid disputes (targeting provocative protests)	Will reduce community provocation, allowing other measures to work more effectively	Difficult given human rights and free speech laws / Will drive activism underground and make it more extreme	
Disrupt markets (legal action against PKK individuals and businesses)	Will dissuade activists from offending / Demonstrates increased anti-PKK community sentiment	Very costly, as the PKK already has large, affiliated law firms	Bring legal action in groups (and pool funds for legal fees) to increase chances of success / Threaten legal action, but don't actually take it (in many cases, the mere prospect of legal action is enough to dissuade activists)
Extend guardianship (community schemes and neighbourhood watches)	Demonstrates increased anti-PKK community sentiment	Has shown to fail in the past (e.g. short-lived PKK-Cemevi deal in the 1990s)	Set up organisations to match the PKK's funding, devotion and lobbying power. This will make such schemes more effective and also more widely counter their political lobbying aims
Strengthen formal surveillance (CCTV in PKK hotspots)	Collecting as much evidence as possible can improve chances of other measures, e.g. disrupting markets through legal action	UK already has wide network of CCTV / Past attempts to report PKK activists based on CCTV footage have proven futile	Evidence of PKK crimes already exists, so the focus should be on ensuring that it is appropriately used by the authorities and judiciary
Assist natural surveillance (confidential hotlines)	Most activists are coerced and have nowhere to turn to	Potentially very costly / Law enforcement may not utilise produced evidence	Establish community organisations that can effectively facilitate this / Use emotive propaganda to convince activists to disclose information
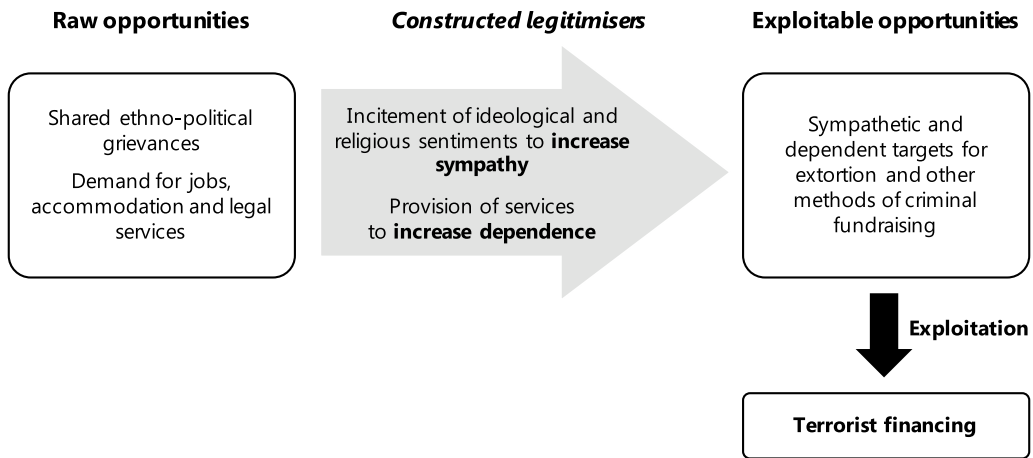
Figure 7. The PKK's legitimiser construction process.

be understood by recalling the experiences of an interviewee describing a typical PKK extortion attempt, in effect providing an example of Martin Seligman's theory of "learned helplessness" where repeat victims of stressful situations eventually give up trying to resist them:[95]

> . . . It has become so normalised now that eventually victims just give money automatically.

Unlike other environmental crime-provoking and inadvertently occurring stimulants conceptualised by Wortley (precipitators) and Clarke and Eck (social facilitators)[96], legitimisers are artificially and intentionally constructed by criminals intending to generate a pool of low-risk, high-reward exploitable criminal opportunities. This use of emotive means to achieve rational ends demonstrates that an equally emotive-rational "dual" approach is needed to counter legitimiser-enabled crime opportunities, discussed in the next section.

Deconstructing the PKK's legitimisers

The PKK's activities in London highlight the dangerous capabilities of legitimisers to enable a situation where serious crimes, such as terrorist financing, can co-exist with widespread support and minimal resistance towards the criminal entity involved. Hence, SCP interventions that involve alterations to the immediate environment alone are insufficient. They must be enhanced by nudges that deconstruct the PKK's legitimisers at a macro-situational (i.e., community-wide level), so that the underlying factors creating the exploitable opportunities are also addressed. In the PKK's case, this involves countering ideological sympathy and social dependence. The proposed countermeasures in this paper have aimed to account for this, by not only proposing SCP interventions but also "Nudge" enhancements ("SCP+N"), that could possibly "deconstruct" the legitimisers at play. In so doing, interventions can target both the rational offending patterns at surface level and the underlying causes that allowed them to form in the first place, thereby mitigating the potential for crime displacement.

Interviewees were not introduced to the concepts of nudge or legitimisers. However, many repeatedly emphasised the need for counter-narratives to challenge the PKK and their communal homogeneity, furthering the relevance of these theories. The need to establish rival organisations, distribute effective counterpropaganda and bring joint legal cases against their activities were constantly mentioned as means of deconstructing their ideological sympathy. Just like the community-wide effect of legitimisers, these "nudges" would also have community-wide effects, altering the choice architecture of victims to consider more prosocial choices (i.e. standing up to the PKK rather than giving in) that would have otherwise been too dangerous. One interviewee described this as follows.

> Appealing to the conscience of a community is vital if an established routine such as extortion is to be countered. It will allow an effective mitigation of those who ideologically support the PKK's cause, no matter how few. More crucially, it will allow established routines such as extortion to become more questioned and thus 'break' their pattern.

For a "nudge" to occur, interventions must appeal to subconscious fundamental grievances and fears held throughout the community. This was exemplified by interviewees suggesting that the mere *presence* of legal threats or confidential hotlines, even if unused, could suffice in deconstructing the illusion of social dependence created by the PKK, given the perceived presence of alternatives. Incidentally, both these particular measures received the highest mean scores (/5) in surveys (3.61 and 3.42 respectively). Even for the "hard" SCP measure (CCTV), interviewees did not place emphasis on the physical need for cameras (citing their existing abundance), but on the deterrent (or "nudging") effect they would have on criminals if evidence collected from them was better utilised.

While deemed effective in countering ideological sympathy and social dependence, much of the suggested implementation strategies require significant funding and devotion from rival community groups and diplomatic services to establish effectively. While challenging in this regard, interviewees were almost unanimous in suggesting that prevention efforts were futile otherwise, with one summarising the argument of this research in the following manner.

> A mosquito may occasionally bite, but the ultimate goal must be to drain the swap that allows them to flourish. The PKK, which is used by foreign powers to fulfil their wider goals in the region, may occasionally 'bite' the normal community. However, the response must be to address the factors that allow it to thrive. Therefore, preventing their small-scale crimes is very much a waste of valuable time.

Limitations and further research

The outcome of this research has both practical and theoretical implications. Given the near-unanimous negative perception of the police and existing enforcement, the findings in this paper now provide an opportunity for both community groups and Turkish diplomatic services to implement countermeasures against the PKK's overseas fundraising using an SCP+N approach. To develop the insight gained from this research further and test its applicability across contexts, more comprehensive replications can be conducted in larger diasporas or for other terrorist groups entirely, this time widening the pool of consulted respondents. Indeed, one core limitation of this research was that only victims, rather than PKK supporters or offenders, were consulted for ethics and security reasons. Given also that the research was itself conducted by a researcher opposing the PKK's actions and ideals, the possibility of bias is acknowledged.

Wider implications and theoretical impact

This study has broad implications for the understanding and prevention of terrorism and political violence. Firstly, specific to the financing thereof, survey and interviewee insights demonstrate that terrorist financing involves actors engaging with both the public sphere (for lobbying purposes) and the criminal underworld. Network analysis, therefore, can be crucial for investigating the composition of a terrorist group or its overseas affiliates, making inroads from its most public (and thus vulnerable) operations and then identifying actors that are mutually involved with wider terrorism financing and propaganda efforts. From a policing and investigatory perspective, targeting terrorist financing can therefore have consequential effects on further identifying perpetrators linked to organised crime, money laundering and other serious and/or violent offences.

This research and its theoretical contributions (such as the concept of constructed legitimisers), are also relevant to emotionally or politically charged criminogenic circumstances more generally. It is evident that manipulable societal characteristics unique to certain socioeconomic groups can be exploited for the purposes of legitimising serious organised crime, terrorism and political violence. This is despite many said characteristics (such as minority rights and religion) having inherently

peaceful or lawful connotations. Thus, a better understanding of how vulnerable communities perceive the role of race, religion, media and politics is crucial to prevent legitimisers from being constructed by exploitative entities in the first place. This applies to the ethno-religious sentiments co-opted by narco-terrorist entities such as the PKK, radicalisation of Muslim communities by Islamist terror groups, political messaging to encourage left-wing violence and the role of right-wing extremism in inciting, for example, the January 2021 storming of the United States Capitol. SCP+N, applied appropriately, can be effective in deconstructing legitimisers in all of these circumstances, as long as interventions and 'Nudges' are designed to be receptive to the specific legitimisers at play (as they will be different in each situation)

Conclusion

This paper began with an interviewee quote, highlighting that measures solely focused on apprehending criminals are futile as the crime itself continues to exist. Presenting an in-depth insight into how a terrorist group functions in diasporic communities, this research has shown that not only is this the case, but that said crime (terrorist financing) exists with widespread support and minimal resistance. This research has argued that legitimisers, namely manipulable societal characteristics that allow offenders to generate a compliant pool of victims while minimising resistance, are the cause of this set of circumstances. Prevention measures must therefore address them to succeed. To do so, a dual prevention approach, fronted by situational crime prevention and nudge theory, has been proposed. SCP serves to tackle the surface offending patterns via reducing rational incentives to offend, while nudging serves to delegitimise the PKK and change the choice architecture of both offenders and victims to desist from or resist PKK activities such as extortion.

The results of this research are therefore threefold. The first is that it has provided a comprehensive, original and first-hand insight into the dynamics of overseas terrorist financing, a crime that has seldom been studied in as much depth. The second, specific to the PKK's situation in London, highlights through surveys and interviews that ideological sympathy and social dependence are the two legitimisers that must be challenged by prevention measures. The third is that similar approaches are useful in any situation where a crime has been legitimised by the offending entity in the first place —first understanding the nature of legitimisers and then developing situational measures enhanced by nudging, namely "SCP+N" interventions, to counter them. To highlight the importance of this, this research concludes with another interviewee quote, which in effect serves as an answer to the dilemma presented by the quote at the very beginning:

> Preventing [the PKK's] small-scale crimes is very much a waste of valuable time. [...] The response must be to address the factors that allow them to thrive.

Data availability statement

The data collected (survey and interview responses) for this research was collected under strict agreements of confidentiality that was a pre-requisite for high-risk ethics approval. The corresponding dataset can therefore not be shared.

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