

Report on Bachelor / Master Thesis

Institute of Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague

Student:	Kristýna Matoulková
Advisor:	PhDr. Lubomír Cingl
Title of the thesis:	Can Club Model Explain the Rise of the Islamic State?

OVERALL ASSESSMENT (provided in English, Czech, or Slovak):

The thesis chose an interesting and unusual topic where the author applies economic concept of club good on terrorist group, namely Daish (ISIL). She tries to explain the behavior of the group with the model, predict its future actions and suggest possible measures. The concept has been already applied on other extreme religious groups such as Taliban or Hamas. The results suggest that many of behavioral patterns can be explained by the club model (e.g. violence and sacrifice) and therefore measures to fight Daish should focus more on decreasing funding of the group or increasing outside options for fighters.

The thesis is extremely interesting and it is clear that the author analysed the topic into depth. However, the thesis would benefit if written in a more succinct and coherent way better highlighting the most important information and findings. I don't think it is necessary to describe model in all three consecutive versions (subsections 3.1. and 3.2.) or describe its application on all different terrorist groups (section 4). On the other hand, the author should focus more on ruling out alternative explanations for observed behavior. It is of even higher relevance since information are scarce and sketchy and slipping to simplifications or misinterpretations could be quite easy.

Below I mention a few specific comments, mostly to the analysis:

- Subsection 5.5. – explanations about leaked documents are highly speculative. Moreover, interpreting various potential explanations in favour of the model seems a bit shaky.
- The assumption that violence and atrocities are not the objective of the group is questionable. Apart from establishing the caliphate, one of the objectives, according to my knowledge, is the war against non-believers. Then atrocities and acts of violence may well fit under this explanation. Therefore, this problem should be addressed more in depth since it is the key assumption for interpreting the behavior within the framework of model.
- The argument about higher violence and number of fighters can be easily stated as reversed causality – better marketing of their violence (also due to higher funding) leads to higher number of fighters. Therefore, violence does not have necessarily be a tool how to discourage free-riders.
- It should be better distinguished between different types of violence since violence can both bring higher gains in terms of new territories or have other indirect profits for the group. Therefore, these different types of violence can have different motivations.
 - o In the analysis, the author uses very broad terms: “*Terrorism, Rebellion, Sectarian violence, Kidnapping, Massacres, Murders, Violence, Raids, Mass murders, Religious fundamentalism, Displaced persons, Hostages, Genocide, Extremism, Human rights*“ which could include lots of events where the purpose was not to discourage free-riders (e.g. regular clashes with other parties in the region). I think the author goes along that way, it is just not clearly stated in the text.
 - o On the other hand, in the subsection 6.5. the author bases her analysis on a few extreme observations (e.g. Paris and California attacks) which could well be outliers.
- Process of data collection and data description is too long which distracts reader (for example subsection „Graph Plotting and Checking for Accuracy“).

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- The relationship between decrease of funding, decrease of fighters and higher violence (page 68) is very speculative. It could be also true that it was a defense mechanism how to show that its power is not decreasing.

To sum it up, the thesis is an interesting piece of work. Kristýna creatively applies media analysis in the moment when standard data are not available. She definitely managed to go under the surface using many relevant sources both from economic literature as well as other fields. It is therefore a pity, that she does not deliver the narrative and results in a more succinct and clear way. Even though she manages to discuss and interpret most of the results correctly, a few questions need to be answered. From all of the abovementioned reasons, **I recommend the thesis for defence and suggest grade 1-2 (výborně – velmi dobře).**

Questions for the defence:

- Could you rule out the hypothesis that atrocities are not the objective of the group?
- Is there any argument to rule out reverse causality? Namely, violence can make the organization more attractive which then leads to increase in number of fighters. In the same vein, it may coincide with periods of high funding since they just have more money to market themselves better?
- Would your analysis change if you focus only on those violent acts which could not be interpreted in another way (e.g. profits) than in favour of the club model? (beheadings etc.)
- What counter-measures does the model suggest for fighters from developed countries, in particular of outside options and provision of services?

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Literature</i> (max. 20 points)	20
<i>Methods</i> (max. 30 points)	21
<i>Contribution</i> (max. 30 points)	25
<i>Manuscript Form</i> (max. 20 points)	15
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	81
GRADE (1 – 2 – 3 – 4)	1-2

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NAME OF THE REFEREE: PhDr. Václav Korbel

DATE OF EVALUATION: 21.4.2016



Referee Signature

EXPLANATION OF CATEGORIES AND SCALE:

LITERATURE REVIEW: *The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and command of recent literature. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way.*

<i>Strong</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Weak</i>
20	10	0

METHODS: *The tools used are relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the author's level of studies. The thesis topic is comprehensively analyzed.*

<i>Strong</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Weak</i>
30	15	0

CONTRIBUTION: *The author presents original ideas on the topic demonstrating critical thinking and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and empirics. There is a distinct value added of the thesis.*

<i>Strong</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Weak</i>
30	15	0

MANUSCRIPT FORM: *The thesis is well structured. The student uses appropriate language and style, including academic format for graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables and disposes with a complete bibliography.*

<i>Strong</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Weak</i>
20	10	0

Overall grading:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE		
81 – 100	1	= excellent	= výborně
61 – 80	2	= good	= velmi dobře
41 – 60	3	= satisfactory	= dobře
0 – 40	4	= fail	= nedoporučuji k obhajobě