# Jihadist Leaders Dataset Codebook

## Definitions

*Militant Leader*

The study focuses on the top-level leaders of armed groups. Due to this focus, we follow Prorok (2016) in defining militant leaders as individuals who occupy the highest-ranking organizational position in an armed group.

*Armed Group*

We conceptualize armed groups as non-state actors that utilize violence to achieve organizational goals. This broad definition encompasses rebel organizations, militias, violent political parties, as well as smaller groups often described as terrorist organizations (Malone, 2022). We thus do not exclude groups based on their targeting practices (i.e., attacks against civilians), control of territory, organizational capacity (i.e., number of deaths caused), or presence in a civil war setting. While jihadist organizations are frequently described as terrorist groups (Kalyvas, 2018), we view jihadist organizations as an ideological subset of armed groups.

*Jihadist Organization*

There is no consensus definition of 'jihadist organization' in existing research. Hegghammer (2017: 9) notes that studies adopting a narrow definition of jihadism concentrate on 'a subset of particularly violent conservative, and uncompromising Sunni groups.' This definition includes 'Salafi-jihadist' groups such as al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and Boko Haram.

In contrast, a 'broad' definition of jihadist refers to 'Islamist groups of all ideological orientations, so long as they wage violence' (Hegghammer 2017: 9). This relates to Nielsen's (2017: 3) definition of jihadism as 'violent Islamism. It is Islamism because jihadist ideology holds that society should be governed by Islamic doctrines (according to jihadists' interpretation of Islam). It is inherently violent because jihadists hold that violence is a legitimate means for achieving the society and government they desire.'

We adopt a broad definition for this study, defining jihadist organizations as Islamist groups that utilize violence to achieve organizational goals. This includes violent Sunni and Shia Islamist organizations. We follow Ahmad (2019: 85) in defining an Islamist group as 'any substrate movement that utilizes Islamic ideas, identity, symbols, and rhetoric toward the goal of creating political order on the basis of Islamic laws, ideas, and institutions.'

## Inclusion Criteria

With these definitions in hand, we gathered a list of jihadist organizations from existing conflict databases. This list of datasets includes the Armed Group Dataset (AGD) (Malone, 2022), the

Mapping Militants Project (MMP) (Crenshaw, 2010), and the Big, Allied and Dangerous Database (BAAD) (Asal and Rethemeyer, 2015). The BAAD features 'updated, vetted and sourced narratives, and relationship information and social network data on 50 of the most notorious terrorist organizations in the world since 1998, with additional network information on more than 100 organizations.' The MMP, in turn, 'traces the evolution of violent militant or extremist organizations in specified conflict theatres and analyzes their interactions,' providing detailed profiles on 280 armed groups operating in conflicts around the world. Moreover, the AGD serves as a comprehensive dataset on 1,202 armed groups active between 1970 and 2012, offering insights into organizational grievances, origins, operations, external support, and group outcomes. We supplemented these databases—encompassing both Sunni and Shi'a groups—with recent cross-national research on violence perpetrated by Sunni jihadist groups. Specifically, we draw on Brzezinski's (2023) sample of groups, which includes all Sunni jihadist groups in the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) that were responsible for a minimum of ten fatalities.

However, it is essential to acknowledge several limitations to this collection strategy. First, BAAD focuses on the most well-known terrorist groups in the international system. Likewise, MMP notes that their sampling procedure 'selects the most visible and active militant organizations.' Brzezinski's threshold of 10 fatalities also excludes jihadist groups that failed to reach a sufficient level of organizational capacity. Additionally, the AGD's temporal focus fails to capture groups that formed in more recent conflicts. Moreover, it is important to note that we excluded a number of borderline cases for various reasons. Such reasons centered on ambiguities surrounding organizations' ideology as well as uncertainties regarding a group's independence from other armed actors. Additionally, given the dataset's focus, we excluded groups for which we struggled to find verifiable information on organizational leadership. Our dataset may thus be biased towards more visible and well-known groups and should not be viewed as a comprehensive list of all jihadist organizations operating across time and space.

Despite these limitations, we gathered detailed information on the backgrounds and pre-war experiences of 238 leaders from 110 jihadist organizations. These organizations operated in Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa between 1976 and 2023. Based on our focus on armed groups, this includes a wide range of organizations with varying levels of size and organizational capacity that operated in civil war and non-civil war settings. Adopting a cross-regional approach, our list of groups constitutes one of the largest data collection efforts on jihadist organizations to date.

Of the 110 groups in our sample, 79 appear in the MMP, 69 in the AGD, 44 in the BAAD, and 67 in Brzezinski's dataset. Looking specifically at the three established datasets on armed groups (MMP, AGD, and BAAD), 50 groups appear in both the MMP and the AGD, 32 appear in both the MMP and the BAAD, and 43 appear in both the AGD and the BAAD. Thirty-two groups appear in all three of these datasets. To facilitate integration with these and other datasets, we have

also created a Master Organizations Directory that standardizes group names in the JLD and maps them to their corresponding entries in the MMP, AGD, BAAD, GTD, Brzezinski (2023), the Database on Suicide Attacks (DSAT) (Pape et al., 2021), and the Violent Non-State Actor Rivalry (ViNSAR) Dataset (Conrad et al., 2023).

**Coding Procedures**

Our approach to data collection was intentionally conservative. We only coded a '1' or '0' when we found strong evidence of the presence or absence of a particular life event. This coding procedure for '0' relates to the method adopted by Conrad et al., (2023: 6) in their dataset (ViNSAR) on militant group competition. The authors state that 'when one of these rivalry variables is coded as "0," it should be interpreted as "no evidence found." Although we applied exhaustive search criteria during the data collection process, there is the possibility that coders were unable to find evidence of a behavior, even when it occurred (especially if it was never reported in the media).' However, if no definitive source could be located for a certain period in a leader's life, we coded the variables as missing to allow researchers greater flexibility in handling such uncertainty. Although it is reasonable to assume that many of the missing entries are effectively 'no,' we preferred to err on the side of transparency and offer users the ability to make modeling decisions based on their own assumptions.

Importantly, rather than being collected by a large team of research assistants, the data were coded directly by the authors. We identified any observations of concern and discussed potential discrepancies during our weekly review meetings. This approach ensures consistency in coding and fosters transparency in decision-making across the dataset. Additionally, our data sources are represented in six languages: Arabic, English, French, German, Turkish, and Urdu. Scholars have expressed concerns about language diversity in conflict datasets (Raleigh et al., 2023). By prioritizing sources in multiple languages, we analyzed a comprehensive range of materials to capture leadership biographies beyond the confines of Western, English-language media.

**Variables**

- leader_name1
    - The leader's first name.

- leader_name2
    - The leader's family name.

- alternate_name
    - Leader's nickname or 'kunya.'

- group_name
    - The name of the organization.

- state_name
    - The state(s) in which the group primarily operates.

- year_power
    - The years in which the individual was the leader of the organization.

- birth_year
    - The year the individual was born.

- birth_age
    - The age of the leader during his leadership tenure.

- death_year
    - If relevant, the year that the leader was killed. This date accounts for leadership death while in power. This does not account for if the leader left the group and later died.

- education
    - This variable accounts for the level of education received by each leader. This category is broken down into four different categories. Inclusion in each category requires taking at least some courses in the category. For instance, Hassan Hattab reportedly enrolled in college before dropping out. Given Hattab enrolled in university, this case would be coded as postsecondary. In cases where leaders completed religious studies degrees at universities, this would count as postsecondary or graduate education as well as religious education.
        - Primary (before high school)
        - Secondary (high school)
        - Postsecondary (university)
        - Graduate (MA and beyond)

- education_religious
    - This variable accounts for whether a leader received any type of formal religious education prior to becoming an armed group leader. This could include madrassa education, enrollment in Quranic schools or Islamic universities, or the completion of university degrees in Islamic Studies or Shari'a law. Abbas al-Musawi, for instance, spent time as a student at a Shia Hawza in Najaf, Iraq.
        - 1 = yes
        - 0 = no

- occupation_ISCOCode
    - This variable captures the International Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) for the main occupation of the leader.

- pre-leader occupation
    - This variable examines leaders' occupation(s) before joining their armed group.

- leadership_age
    - This variable accounts for the number of years in which the leader was in charge of the organization.

- Afghanistan_time
    - This variable indicates whether an individual spent time in Afghanistan before or after assuming power. Their time in Afghanistan may have involved receiving military training at an al-Qaeda camp, fighting against the Soviet Union, or living under Taliban rule, among other experiences.
        - 1 = yes
        - 0 = no

- prison_time_before_becoming_leader
    - This variable indicates whether an individual was ever imprisoned before assuming their role as a group leader. For instance, Nasir al-Wuhayshi was arrested and spent time in prison before taking command of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.
        - 1 = yes
        - 0 = no

- Yr_in_prison_preleader
    - If an individual spent time in prison before assuming command of an armed group, this variable specifies the number of years the individual was incarcerated. For instance, Ibrahim Malam Dicko reportedly spent approximately two years in prison prior to taking command of Ansaroul Islam. In this case, the value would be coded as '2.'

- prison_time_after_becoming_leader
    - This variable indicates any evidence that suggests an individual was imprisoned at any point after becoming the group's leader. This includes instances where leaders were arrested but did not experience immediate leadership turnover within their organization. For example, Abdolmalek Rigi of Jundallah in Iran reportedly spent time in prison before being executed by Iranian state authorities. Sources suggest

that the leadership change occurred after his execution, rather than following his arrest.
    - 1 = yes
    - 0 = no

- military_experience
    - This variable captures whether the leader served in a national army before coming to power. It does not include training received from non-state actors. For instance, Hassan Hattab received formal training in the Algerian military before joining the Armed Islamic Group.
        - 1 = yes
        - 0 = no

- rebel_experience
    - This variable accounts for evidence that the leader was a member of another armed organization or that he participated in violent activity against a state prior to joining his current group. Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahraoui, for example, was a member of al-Mourabitoun before splintering and taking command of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara.
        - 1 = yes
        - 0 = no

- rebel_leader
    - This variable indicates whether the leader commanded another organization before leading his current group. For example, Iyad Ag Ghali was the leader of Ansar al-Dine prior to assuming command of Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen.
        - 1 = yes
        - 0 = no

- combat_experience
    - This variable considers whether the leader experienced combat before coming to power, either as a member of an armed group or in the military. It does not include instances where the leader only received military training without actual combat experience.
        - 1 = yes
        - 0 = no

- abroad_activity_type
    - This variable indicates what type of abroad activity a leader pursued when traveling outside of their home country before taking command of their organization. For

example, Seifallah Ben Hussein of Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia reportedly received his education in the United Kingdom and underwent military training in Afghanistan.
    - Education
    - Exile
    - Foreign fighter
    - Military training
    - Recruiter
    - Work

- total_years_abroad
    - This variable records the number of years the leader spent abroad before assuming command.

- previous_function_within_group
    - If applicable, what function did the leader have within the group prior to being the overall commander of the organization (e.g., media spokesperson)?

- entry_method
    - How did the leader come to power? Here, we distinguish between *founded* and *succeeded* for the entry method. If the individual was the first overall group leader, we code the entry method as *founded.* Subsequent leaders are coded as *succeeded.*
        - Founded
        - Succeeded

- exit_method
    - If applicable, how did the leader leave power? While 'coup' refers to violent leadership turnover within the organization, 'resigned' denotes largely non-violent instances of a leader stepping down from his position.
        - Arrested
        - Death
        - Coup
        - Elections
        - Resigned
        - Term (leader appointed for a set period, leaving after that time)
        - Merger
        - Group End

- kill_responsibility
    - If applicable, who was responsible for the leader's death?

        - State
        - Non-state actor (e.g, rival armed group, internal group members)
        - Natural causes (e.g., heart attack, disease)
        - Suicide
        - Unclaimed

- non-state_killed
    If the leader was killed by a non-state actor, which group was responsible?

- kill_method
    - If applicable, what was the method of killing?
        - Drone/airstrike
        - Bombing
        - Firefight
        - Killed in captivity
        - Execution (e.g., hanging after a trial)

- state_killed
    - If the leader was killed by a state, which state was responsible for his death?

- state_arrest
    - If the leader was arrested by a state while in power, which state was responsible for his imprisonment?

- ethnicity
    - What was the leader's ethnicity?

- country_origin
    - What was the leader's country of origin?

- pledged_IS
    - Did the leader have an active pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State? This includes formal oaths of fealty (e.g., *bay'a*) rather than broad statements of support.
        - 1 = yes
        - 0 = no

- pledged_AQ
    - Did the leader have an active pledge of allegiance to al-Qaeda? This includes formal oaths of fealty (e.g., *bay'a*) rather than broad statements of support.
        - 1 = yes

        - 0 = no

- year_pledge
    - If the group pledged fealty to al-Qaeda or the Islamic State, in which year did the pledge occur? For instance, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2006.

- group_ideology_1
    - This variable accounts for distinctions between Sunni and Shi'a jihadist organizations.
        - 1 = Shia
        - 0 = Sunni

- group_ideology_2
    - What are the long-term aspirations of the organization? This distinction draws primarily on Brzezinski's (2023) coding of Salafi-jihadist, Salafist-nationalist, and Deobandi organizations. According to Brzezinski, Salafist-nationalist denotes groups espousing Salafism but without conceiving of their activities as part of a transnational project. The 'Other' category encompasses militant Sunni jihadist groups that seek to achieve organizational goals through the use of violence but do not possess Salafist or Deobandi ideals.
        - Salafi-jihadist
        - Salafist-nationalist
        - Deobandi
        - Shia
        - Other

- group_ideology_3
    - What are the long-term aspirations of the organization? This additional distinction draws on Piazza's (2009) conceptualization of strategic and universalist groups and Hand and Saiya's (2023) coding extensions for these organizations.
        - 1=**Strategic** groups denote armed groups that 'have much more limited and discrete goals: the liberation of specific territory, the creation of an independent homeland, for a specific ethnic group, or the overthrow of a specific government.'
        - 2=**Universalist** groups are organizations with 'highly ambitious, abstract, complex, and nebulous goals that are driven primarily by ideology.' These organizations often identify 'much larger, vague, frequently transnational and more ideologically-constructed communities on whose behalf they

claim to commit attacks and audiences to whom they direct their messages by deed.'

- FTO_designation
    - Is the leader in charge of a group that is formally designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the U.S. government?
        - 1 = yes
        - 0 = no