Collective Action, Foreign Fighting, and the Global Struggle for the Islamic State

Abstract

This project examines the global “foreign fighter” phenomenon, in which individuals fight in a foreign conflict. We explore the question – “Why do ordinary people travel abroad to fight and potentially die for a foreign cause?” – by analyzing a dataset of 27,223 foreign fighters from 75 countries who fought for the Islamic State. The statistical results demonstrate that one must draw on three different bodies of collective action theory to provide a robust explanation. The Islamic State’s foreign fighters come from countries that are predominantly Muslim (social network theory), that have greater levels of educational attainment (grievance theory), and that are experiencing elevated levels of domestic political instability (political opportunity theory). These findings have theoretical implications for understanding the international dimension of collective action, most notably regarding international democracy promotion. Whereas a country’s degree of democracy or authoritarianism does not affect the numbers of foreign fighters from that country, the democratization process and democratic transition foster domestic political instability that in turn favors higher numbers of foreign fighters.

In 2014, a United Kingdom citizen, Mohammed Emwazi, gained international notoriety as the perpetrator of several televised beheadings of captured British and American citizens. Fighting under the name of Abu Abdullah al-Britani (Abu Abdullah the Brit), and nicknamed John the Beatle by his captives and Jihadi John by the international news media, Emwazi was killed in November 2015 by a U.S. drone strike. During this same period, Mohammed Alsousi, the son of a retired Tunisian army officer, dropped out of his university classes one month before graduating, and traveled from Tunis, Tunisia, to fight in Syria. According to records obtained by the Association for Rescuing Tunisians Trapped Abroad, Alsousi was killed in battle in Syria. In December 2015, a bank teller from Alexandria, Virginia, named Mohamed Jamal Khweis, traveled to Syria to fight under the name of Abu Omar al-Amriki (Abu Omar the American). He was captured by Kurdish forces in the town of Sinjar in neighboring Iraq, and turned over to U.S. authorities who extradited him to the United States to be prosecuted by the Justice Department for giving aid to a terrorist organization. The common thread linking these British, Tunisian, and U.S. citizens from three different continents (Europe, Africa, and North America) is that they
traveled internationally to become military combatants in the Syrian civil war for the Islamic State, which is also referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or Daesh (the acronym in Arabic).

The Islamic State’s ability to attract foreign nationals to its cause serves as the most recent manifestation of the global “foreign fighter” phenomenon, in which individuals leave their countries to fight in a foreign conflict.¹ A simple statistic underscores the importance of the case of the Islamic State’s foreign fighters as the most significant instance of foreign fighting in the 21st century: Prior to the Syrian civil war, approximately 30,000 Muslim foreign fighters had taken part in all eighteen conflicts with an Islamic dimension during the last forty years, ranging from the foreign Islamic mujahedin (“freedom fighters”) who fought against Soviet military occupation during the 1980s, to the Bosnian wars of the 1990s, and the ongoing Islamic insurgency on the southern island of Mindanao in the Philippines.² Yet foreign fighters are not only a phenomenon of the Islamic world, but enjoy a rich history in all regions of the globe. According to one authoritative source, more than 335,000 foreign fighters have fought in ninety-three conflicts during the last two hundred years, from the 1821 Greek War of Independence to the Spanish civil war of 1936-39, which served as the most noteworthy case of the 20th century.³

As part of this conflict, roughly 2,800 Americans joined the Lincoln Brigade, named after President Abraham Lincoln, to fight alongside the roughly 40,000 foreign fighters associated with the International Brigades.⁴

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This article is devoted to answering a simple question: Why do ordinary people travel abroad to fight and die for a foreign cause? We are able to leverage this question through the analysis of a dataset that we have compiled of 27,223 foreign fighters from 75 countries who have traveled to Syria and Iraq to fight for the Islamic State during 2012-15. We test a variety of hypotheses that are derivative of three competing explanations for collective action: grievance theory, political opportunity theory, and social network theory. Contrary to the dominant approach within the discipline which tends to emphasize the explanatory power of one body of theory, the statistical results demonstrate that a robust explanation must by necessity draw on all three bodies of theory. Specifically, the results demonstrate that the Islamic State’s foreign fighters come from countries that are predominantly Muslim (social network theory), that have greater levels of educational attainment (grievance theory), and that are experiencing elevated levels of domestic political instability (political opportunity theory). Additional explanations from the collective action literature are unfounded, including distance (i.e., it does not matter how close one lives to the conflict), a country’s level of democracy or authoritarianism, poverty and unemployment, level of internet access, and Arab solidarity.

This article draws on the collective action literature to provide a comprehensive, theoretically-driven statistical analysis of the state-level effects of the foreign fighter phenomenon. Two points are worth noting. First, our analysis draws on a burgeoning qualitative and quantitative literature devoted to exploring the foreign fighter phenomenon. It nonetheless is the first to comprehensively place that analysis within the theoretical context of the collective action literature, including grievance, political opportunity, and social network theories. In so doing, our analysis underscores the importance of political opportunity in fostering higher numbers of foreign fighters. Second, it is also important to underscore that our analysis focuses
on the state-level effects of the foreign fighter phenomenon for the entire universe of 194
countries throughout the globe. As such, this state-level project is but the first step of a larger
two-step project that in the future will focus on individual-level characteristics.\(^5\)

The remainder of this article is divided into four parts. It begins with a review of the
burgeoning literature on foreign fighters, with a special theoretical focus on how three competing
sets of collective action literatures based on grievances, political opportunity, and social
networks can be employed to explain the foreign fighter phenomenon. A comprehensive
grounding of the foreign fighter phenomenon within the collective action literatures constitutes
the greatest shortcoming of analyses to date. Part 2 describes our research design (competing
hypotheses, foreign fighter and independent variables, and empirical approach), followed by
statistical results (Part 3). In a concluding Part 4, we offer broad conclusions and future avenues
for research, including that which focuses on international democracy promotion.

Foreign Fighters and Collective Action

Burgeoning Foreign Fighter Literature

As early as medieval Europe, when the Vikings recruited Scandinavians and other foreigners,
such as the Varangian guard, to “wage war against their monarch,” foreign fighters have been a
staple of global conflict.\(^6\) But while civil wars and insurgencies have consistently mobilized
foreign fighters throughout history, the scholarly literature has yet to provide a compelling
answer to the question of why an individual is willing to travel abroad and fight and potentially
die for a foreign cause.\(^7\) The primary reason for this is that the global foreign fighter

\(^5\) The 194 figure includes 193 United Nations-recognized countries plus Palestine. A total of 34 countries drop out of
the analysis due to missing data. We also do not include Iraq and Syria as the targets of travel for Islamic State
foreign fighters.


\(^7\) Jessica Stern and J.M Berger, ‘ISIS and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon: Why Do People Travel Abroad to Take
Part in Somebody Else’s Violent Conflict?’ *The Atlantic* (8 March 2015), available at:
phenomenon was historically neglected in comparison to other brands of internationally-oriented collective action, such as terrorism.  

This neglect, however, began to change during the last decade, as witnessed by the emergence of a growing literature on foreign fighters. Malet provided the first book-length comparative analysis that remains the standard reference, providing a comprehensive list of 93 conflicts that have attracted foreign fighters during the last two hundred years. He concludes that foreign fighters are driven to defend an ethnically or ideologically-based “transnational identity community.” The primary shortcoming of Malet’s study for the purposes of our study is that his archival data focus on “recruitment messaging” (i.e., the message recruiters deploy to recruit foreign fighters). It therefore does not clarify the state-level factors that drive the foreign fighter phenomenon. Two additional books, published in the last two years, offer insightful analyses by specialists in their respective disciplines, but do not provide theoretically driven analyses based on the collective action literature that are central to this paper. For example, Arielli provides an “historian’s contribution” that focuses on why “foreign fighters were perceived differently by different people in different historical contexts.” His rich historical analysis demonstrates that whereas foreign fighters are perceived by some as terrorists, to others they are heroes fighting for a common cause. Byman, a counter-terrorism and Middle East studies specialist, picks up on this theme of heroism in his 2019 book on “road warriors” in the Islamic world: “Foreign fighters are heroes who take up arms in the name of God – or at least

9 Malet (2013).
that’s how they see themselves.”

Byman explores this and other questions by providing detailed histories of individual foreign fighters, such as Abdallah Azam (“The Prophet”), who fought against Soviet invaders in the 1980s, to Amer Azizi (“The Facilitator”), who helped organize attacks in Europe.

Byman’s book is illustrative of a specific subset of studies that has emerged on Muslim foreign fighters, often referred to as “jihadis,” a phenomenon which became prevalent after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the 1979-1992 war that followed. This conflict is noteworthy in that it constituted the first instance of professionalized Muslim foreign fighters taking part in a global conflict in the contemporary era, underscoring the role of Islam as an important factor in a foreign fighter’s decision-making.

The literature on Muslim foreign fighters has predominantly focused on their impacts in conflicts that have an Islamic dimension, such as Chechnya, as well as on why these fighters have persisted within the larger Islamic world, even when the conflicts in which they have been involved have ended. The primary challenge of this literature is that it neglects the motivations beyond Muslim solidarity that prompted foreign fighters to travel and fight in the first place.

There also exists a case study-oriented literature on the Islamic State’s foreign fighters. One study sets out the demographic characteristics of 378 German foreign fighters, but not why

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they traveled to fight for the Islamic State. It nonetheless provides a first step of designating a cohort of Germans who have committed themselves to the Islamic State’s cause. An analysis of Albanian foreign fighters from Kosovo concludes that they are driven to fight for the Islamic State due to a “youth bulge” in Kosovo, which is compounded by one of the lowest per capita incomes in Europe and high levels of unemployment. Another analysis of twenty-two Turkish foreign fighter returnees (as well as thirteen of their immediate family members) found that “radicalization” (and hence the emergence of foreign fighters) “is a growing socio-sociocultural problem” that is primarily driven by a “Lack of basic understanding of religion, wanting to take a short-cut to close the gap between an un-Islamic past and a better, redeemed future, as well as Turkey’s geographic proximity to Syria.” According to an investigation of Swedish foreign fighters, preliminary interview evidence suggests that the normalization and socialization of global jihad has made would-be fighters just as likely to embrace a local jihad as they would a global one. It is concluded that the expansion of the internet and international recruiter contacts has led to this growing phenomenon. Additional studies have focused on Belgian foreign fighters, Dutch foreign fighters, and cross-case analyses of both countries as well as Europe.

a whole.\textsuperscript{22} This case study-oriented literature on the Islamic State is a welcome addition, but does not provide compelling answers as to why foreign fighters leave one country to fight for the Islamic State, let alone the arguably more important, comparative answer of why they travel from countries across the entire globe.

There is also a small but growing number of statistical analyses of the foreign fighter phenomenon. One set involves the quantitative analyses of a trove of records discovered in Sinjar, Iraq, of 700 Muslim foreign fighters who entered Iraq between August 2006 and August 2007 to fight occupying U.S. military forces. Initially analyzed at West Point’s Combating Terrorism Center, the so-called “Sinjar records” include “varying levels of information on each fighter, but often include the fighter’s country of origin, hometown, age, occupation, the name of the fighter’s recruiter, and even the route the fighter took to Iraq.”\textsuperscript{23} The statistical analysis of these records has resulted in a limited number of conclusions about why this subset of foreign fighters entered the war in Iraq, ranging from a combination of Muslim affinity, geographic proximity (neighboring countries), and the authoritarian nature of the source country,\textsuperscript{24} to the argument that these foreign fighters came from more developed and more religious societies that were also occupied by U.S. or Israeli military forces.\textsuperscript{25} One of the drawbacks of the Sinjar records is that they document only a small fraction of a much larger number of foreign fighters, who entered from only one transit point into Iraq.


Of greater relevance to this article are the statistical analyses of the foreign fighter phenomenon specifically related to ISIS and the Syrian civil war. The two most recent, insightful analyses that are representative of as well as presenting the challenges associated with this trend include a 2018 article by economists Efraim Benmelech and Esteban F. Klor and a 2019 article by a political scientist, Elena Pokalova. Both studies, which represent among the best of their disciplines, test for a large number of factors, not surprisingly leading to competing conclusions. Whereas Benmelech and Klor find that the number of foreign fighters is positively correlated with a country’s GDP per capita, Human Development Index (HDI), economic development, low income inequality, highly developed political institutions, size of Muslim population, and ethnic homogeneity, Pokalova underscores the statistical importance of HDI, unemployment rates, percentages of youth population, population size, percentages of Muslim population, emigration levels, internet penetration, and the presence of Al Qaida cells. Even when there is overlap, however, the analysis needs to be clarified further. Both studies, for example, find a positive relationship between a country’s HDI and the number of foreign fighters, but do not break down and separate out which specific aspect of HDI (which combines a country’s level of education, health and income) is responsible for this finding. For the purposes of our study, we focus on levels of educational attainment, which our earlier field research in Tunisia has indicated should be key (i.e., we were struck by the number of Tunisian foreign fighters who had university or advanced degrees in a variety of disciplines). Second, both


analyses draw on either early or single estimates of foreign fighters for a given period of time. Our study instead utilizes updated numbers from the Soufan group, as well as high and low estimates and averages for each country. Third, and most important, neither of the above-mentioned studies are grounded in the collective action literature, instead testing for a variety of competing factors. Our study instead systematically reviewed and derived hypotheses from the various collective action literatures, leading us to explore a heretofore neglected aspect of foreign fighters: the role of political opportunity, and specifically whether a country was experiencing domestic political instability, ranging from anti-government demonstrations to revolutions, which is discussed further below.

**Foreign Fighters and the Collective Action Literature**

The most noteworthy shortcoming of the foreign fighter literature is that it has not been comprehensively grounded in the three major bodies of theoretical literature devoted to understanding collective action. The first links grievances to collective action, including the foreign fighter phenomenon. Scholars of civil conflict have long linked the depth of an individual’s economic and political grievances with rebellion. Since Davies\(^29\) and Gurr\(^30\) developed models of rebellion and revolution, “relative deprivation” has been said to translate into political violence.\(^31\) Grievance theories now intersect different research paradigms, including


theories of peasant rebellion, civil war, and terrorism. According to these theories, discontent over grievances is necessary to explain any account of collective action, including foreign fighters, because grievances provide the primary motivational impetus for collective organization and violence.

Several variants of grievance theory are of use to our understanding of foreign fighters. The most common focuses on economic deprivation. The United Nations Development Program cites economic deprivation, as measured by GNI per capita and education, as key to the organization’s cross-national measure of relative standard of living and relative economic capabilities (HDI). Many scholars in the political violence and civil conflict field use variations of this index as a predictor of collective violence. A second variant links an individual’s or group’s lack of civil and political rights to collective violence. Beginning with Durkheim’s theory of anomie, or the social and/or political break between individuals and their communities, the idea that lacking access to “normal” channels for airing grievances will create violence has become a popular explanation in the literature. Merton acknowledged anomie as a

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38 For example, see Humphreys and Weinstein (2008).
39 These objective measures of economic deprivation are derived from the literature and have been used to proxy a population’s feelings of grievances and deprivation without having individual-level data.
40 Émile Durkheim, Suicide: A Study in Sociology (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1951 [1897]).
source of deviant behavior when he developed “strain theory” in the late-1940s, arguing that this
type of a behavior resulted from a lack of “legitimate” opportunities. More recently, scholars
have adopted variations of strain theory to explain conflict in developing countries in the Middle
East and Sub-Saharan Africa, arguing that violence and conflict can be explained by the
isolation of citizens within authoritarian countries, who are unable to access the loci of political
decision-making. The specific implication for the foreign fighter phenomenon is that grievances,
whether economic (poverty, unemployment, or lack of education) or political (lack of civil or
political rights), will lead foreign fighters to leave their countries for meaningful opportunities
abroad.

A second body of collective action theory (political opportunity theory) argues that it is
not grievances – which “are always present” – that drive collective action, but the ability of
actors such as foreign fighters to mobilize support and resources at appropriate times. Political
opportunity theory emphasizes the role of situational context, timing, and mechanisms of
action. According to this approach, it is only when there is an opening for new actors that
collective action can occur. Such a context arises in several different forms. For example,
Skocpol demonstrated the importance of international pressures and domestic political crises in

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42 John Chalcraft, *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University
Press, 2016); Quintan Wiktorowicz (Ed.), *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington:
43 Robert D. Kaplan, ‘The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, Tribalism, and Disease are
Rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of Our Planet,’ *The Atlantic* (February 1994), accessed at:
44 For example, see Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1978).
45 Herbert P. Kitschelt, ‘Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four
Democracies,’ *British Journal of Politics*, 16:1 (1986), pp. 57-85; Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A
Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Sidney
Tarrow, ‘Studying Contentious Politics: From Eventful History to Cycles of Collective Action,’ In Dieter Rucht,
Ruud Koopmans, and Friedhelm Neidhardt (eds.), *Acts of Dissent: New Developments in the Study of Protest*
(Berlin: Sigman, 1998), pp. 33-64.
influencing social revolutions. Her model detailed the symbiotic role of both exogenous international shocks, such as conflict and war, and endogenous pressures brought about by economic competition and elite dissatisfaction as crucial catalysts for social revolution. Others have emphasized certain mechanisms that alter relations among actors and the situational contexts in which they operate. Tarrow summarized various types of mechanisms that have historically explained collective outcomes, such as environmental mechanisms, i.e., diverse forms of domestic political instability like protests, riots, and wars. This is potentially the least understood element of the foreign fighter phenomenon.

Another strand of political opportunity theory of relevance to understanding the foreign fighter phenomenon focuses on the role of “repertoires of contention” that define the strategic “toolkit” of a collective group. According to Tilly, repertoires are the different strategic tools a group can use to challenge authority or rise up for social change. One illustrative example involves the role of social media in the Arab Spring protests of 2010-11. It is argued that this new strategic tool allowed protestors to plan, organize, and execute collective protests and rebellions that led to the overthrow of three long-entrenched dictators (Hosni Mubarak in Egypt,

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46 Skocpol (1979).
48 Tarrow (2012).
50 Tilly (1986); della Porta (2013).
Muammar Qaddafi in Libya, and Zine el Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia), three civil wars (in Libya, Syria, and Yemen), and new avenues for democratic change (such as in Tunisia). Political opportunity explanations help account for the exogenous explanations for the foreign fighter phenomenon by emphasizing the political context in which these fighters mobilized. 

A third body of collective action theory emphasizes the role of social networks in motivating individuals such as foreign fighters to organize collectively. Scholars who emphasize the role of social networks maintain that preexisting ties to a network, whether physical, ideological, or both are important factors driving group mobilization. They further note that preexisting networks serve as fertile recruitment grounds because individuals within a network are thought to be like-minded. The theoretical assumption of those who utilize social network analysis is relatively straightforward: “Knowing someone who is already involved in social movement activity is one of the strongest predictors of recruitment into the membership.” But while the explanatory power of social ties remains a strong explanatory variable, decades of scholarship on social network analysis has yet to yield a coherent explanation for individual mobilization outside of network ties.

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55 della Porta (2013); Reynolds and Hafez (2017).

One fruitful exception comes from the growing social network literature that emphasizes the role of identity and ideology in motivating participation. The role of identity in these studies is a semiotic one; individuals whose identity conforms to that of an organization or group are more likely to participate in support or defense of that group. A feeling of cohesion with a group can even encourage strong pro-group behavior when that group is part of an extended network where strong relational ties exist without any personal relation. Even when a group is quite large, when its members share core values and attributes, individuals are more likely to project familial ties, which enhance a willingness to sacrifice for that group. Even Tilly, one of the first proponents of political opportunity theory, acknowledged the importance of identity in motivating group behavior, noting that ethnic, religious, and nationalist values are only meaningful when they are shared by a broader identity group. Social network explanations can help account for the saliency of identity to the membership of foreign fighter groups. They can also help explain where geographically recruits are likely to hail from, as well as what appeals might attract foreign fighters in the first place. In sum, the nascent foreign fighter literature and the more established collective action literature together provide the basis for undertaking a theoretically informed analysis of the state-level factors that explain why individuals leave their homes to fight in foreign conflicts.

**Research Design**

*Creating a Dependent Variable of Foreign Fighters*

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58 Swann Jr., et al. (2012).

59 Tilly (2002).

60 For example, see Malet (2013).
The starting point of our research design involves the creation of a dependent variable of Islamic State foreign fighters divided by origin country. We utilize Mendelsohn’s definition of foreign fighters as individuals who have citizenship external to the conflict zones in which they go to fight.\(^6\) As a result, these individuals cannot necessarily be defined along with the modern “terrorist.”\(^6\) The foreign fighter variable is created by collating estimates from two different sources: the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR)\(^6\) and the Soufan Group.\(^6\) There are only three cases that were captured by the ICSR that are not captured by the Soufan Group (Bahrain, Ukraine, and Yemen) but we still combine the two sources to give us the broadest range of estimates. To account for the difference in estimates between the two data sources, we erred on the side of reporting the average. We also create dependent variables based on the lowest reported estimate between the two data sources and the highest reported estimate between the two data sources and tested them in separate models as robustness checks. Our study includes all countries from the two sources with at least one confirmed case to cover the broadest recruitment range. Countries that sent no foreign fighters are coded as zero.

**Table 1**

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\(^{16}\) Mendelsohn (2011).

\(^{62}\) Malet (2015).


Grievance Theory-Inspired Hypotheses

The grievance literature serves as the source of four hypotheses. First, it is expected that poorer countries do not have sufficient wealth to provide economic opportunity to all of their citizens. As a result, those citizens who lack economic opportunity are more likely to seek such opportunity abroad.65 The hypothesis for this expectation would be:

H₁: The poorer the country, the higher the number of citizens from that country who will travel to fight for the Islamic State.

Per capita income is operationalized by adopting the World Bank’s measure of Gross National Income (GNI) per capita based on Purchasing Power Parity.66 This variable is logged.

A second grievance involves a country’s unemployment level. It is expected that unemployed citizens are more likely to heed calls from abroad to travel and fight for a foreign cause. Those with jobs would be less likely to heed such calls.67 The hypothesis for this expectation would be:

H₂: The higher a country’s unemployment rate, the higher the number of citizens from that country who will travel to fight for the Islamic State.

We adopt the World Bank’s measure of a country’s unemployment.68

Grievances are also derivative of the degree of educational attainment in a country. The central connection to grievance theory is that such individuals are aggrieved by a lack of

educational opportunities, and therefore serve as foreign fighters abroad. In this sense, education is a key measure of perception of relative standard of living and relative economic capabilities. The hypothesis involving this factor would be:

\[ H_3: \text{The lower the level of education in a country, the higher the number of citizens from that country who will travel to fight for the Islamic State.} \]

A country’s level of educational attainment is measured using an indicator for level of education obtained from the United Nations Human Development Index.

A final grievance indicator focuses on the political dimension. It is widely believed that political systems governed by authoritarian regimes breed political radicalization. This is due to the fact that such regimes favor stability over freedom, democracy, and accountability. Individuals from these types of political systems are more likely to be dissatisfied and do not have the legitimate domestic outlets to relay their dissatisfaction. They therefore are more prone to join a radical organization such as the Islamic State that pledges to change the existing political order. The specific hypothesis would be:

\[ H_4: \text{The more authoritarian a country, the higher the number of citizens from that country who will travel to fight for the Islamic State.} \]

We employ the Polity IV score of regime authority, which ranges from a best score (highly democratic) of 10 to a worst score (highly autocratic) of -10.

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70 UNDP (2016).


Political Opportunity Theory-Inspired Hypotheses

The political opportunity literature serves as the source of two hypotheses. The first is derivative of whether a country is experiencing domestic political instability. Regardless of whether democratic or authoritarian, a stable regime is presumably capable of maintaining control over its population and is therefore less likely to serve as sources of foreign fighters. In contrast, countries experiencing political destabilization, ranging from small-scale political demonstrations to local bouts of guerrilla warfare, are less capable of controlling their populations. The hypothesis would be:

Hs: The more domestic political instability a country is experiencing, the higher the number of citizens who will travel from that country to fight for the Islamic State.

We operationalized our domestic political instability variable using a combined variable from the Cross-national Time-series Data Archive published by Databanks International. This variable combines and weights eight “domestic conflict events” of varying levels of intensity, ranging from anti-government demonstrations to revolutions. This variable is logged.

The second political opportunity variable included in our analysis focuses on the impact that a new repertoire of contention, the internet, has had on the foreign fighter phenomenon. The relationship between internet penetration and foreign fighters is complicated. In the case of the Islamic State, the internet has been a powerful tool used to intensify anti-Western sentiment that has helped create the backlash that defines the Islamic State’s political agenda. Additionally,

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the increased communication and interconnectivity that results from greater access to the internet is believed to serve as a primary mechanism of Islamic State recruitment, as propaganda has been their most powerful tool. For example, Klausen details how the Islamic State uses Twitter as a critical element of operational strategy, including recruitment. The following hypothesis is derived from these findings:

\[ H_6: \text{The higher a country’s internet connectivity, the higher the number of citizens from that country who will travel to fight for the Islamic State.} \]

This variable is operationalized using World Bank data of internet users per 100 people.

*Social Network Theory-Inspired Hypotheses*

Our final hypotheses emerge from the social network literature. Two aspects are important. First, the Islamic State only recruits Muslims to be part of its fighting force. The organization’s ideology is based on Islamic fundamentalism and it is therefore logical that the organization will recruit from predominantly Muslim countries. The hypothesis would be as follows:

\[ H_7: \text{The higher the percentage of a country’s population that is Muslim, the higher the number of citizens from that country who will travel to fight for the Islamic State.} \]

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The variable “Muslim” is operationalized as the percentage of a country’s population that self-identifies as Muslim. These data are obtained from the Religious Diversity Index of the Pew Research Center.\textsuperscript{79}

Second, the Islamic State’s territory straddled the two Arab countries of Syria and Iraq and therefore it is also logical that the organization will recruit from other predominantly Arab countries. The hypothesis would be as follows:

\textit{H}_0: \text{The higher the percentage of a country’s population that is Arab, the higher the number of citizens from that country who will travel to fight for the Islamic State.}

The challenge in providing an operationalization for the “Arab” variable is that there currently exists no systematic data source for all countries of the world that details the Arab proportion of a country. As a result, Arab solidarity for the purposes of our analysis is coded as a dummy variable (0-1), with 0 being a non-predominantly Arab country (i.e., less than 50 percent ethnically Arab) and 1 being a predominantly Arab country (i.e., greater than 50 percent ethnically Arab). The use of this dummy variable will enable us to test whether predominantly Arab countries play a special role as sources of foreign fighters for the Islamic State. The data source for this variable is the CIA World Factbook.\textsuperscript{80}

\textit{Control Variable: Does Distance Matter?}

We include a control variable – geography – that is potentially critical to understanding the foreign fighter phenomenon. The assumption is that individuals living closer to the epicenter of a


conflict, and especially in neighboring countries to that conflict, presumably will travel in greater numbers to fight in that conflict.\textsuperscript{81} Those living further away, and therefore subject to higher travel costs, will travel to fight in smaller numbers.

The geographical dimension is operationalized as the number of nautical miles between Damascus, Syria (the epicenter of the conflict) and the capital of the source country. The number for Egypt, for example, would be 331 (the number of nautical miles between Cairo and Damascus). The distance for France would be further (1,769 nautical miles between Paris and Damascus), and the number for the U.S. would be further still (5,099 nautical miles between Washington DC and Damascus). The countries that border Syria and Iraq, such as Turkey, are labeled as 0 nautical miles, due to the greater facility of crossing an adjacent land border to territory governed by the Islamic State.\textsuperscript{82} This variable is logged.

\textit{Method}

Yearly counts of foreign fighters by country are unavailable so we are unable to perform panel analysis. The dependent variables on foreign fighters are instead raw country totals of foreign fighters for the 2011-15 period. Yearly counts available for each independent variable were averaged over the 2011-15 period so that a single data point could be adopted for each. The final dataset, which does not include Syria and Iraq because they serve as the destination of foreign fighters, includes foreign fighter counts for 158 countries. There are countries that sent no foreign fighters and are coded as zero. Countries that did send foreign fighters are unevenly distributed across cases. Moreover, because the data exhibit a wide variance and have standard deviations that are not equal to the means (see Table 2), we use negative binomial regression


\textsuperscript{82} The countries labeled as 0 would include Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, and Turkey.
We report odds ratios (also known as incidence rate ratios) by way of eigenvalues to facilitate substantive interpretations of the results. A total of three negative binomial regression models are presented (Table 3). The core test (Model 1) uses the average foreign fighter estimate derived from the ICSR and the Soufan Group. The two subsequent tests use the low (Model 2) and high (Model 3) estimates from the two data sources as robustness checks. There are no substantial differences between the three models and therefore our findings are robust to alternative specifications.

****Table 2****

**Statistical Results and Analysis**

An opening point is that there is no statistically significant relationship between geographic proximity to a conflict, which served as our control variable, and foreign fighter totals (see Table 3). The common assumption as voiced by one specialist – “the short answer [to the Islamic State’s foreign fighter phenomenon] is that *it’s easy to get there*” (original italics) – does not hold up. Our analysis shows that just because a country borders the conflict zone, or is geographically closer than another country, does not lead to that country sending greater numbers of foreign fighters.

****Table 3****

The statistical analysis provides several results regarding our grievance-based hypotheses. Contrary to expectations, neither poverty (hypothesis #1) nor unemployment (hypothesis #2) are statistically significant. These findings call into question the conventional

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84 Hegghammer (2013).
wisdom that foreign fighters hail from countries where poverty and unemployment are high. The common image of foreign fighters as unemployed, impoverished individuals in search of socio-economic improvement abroad are unfounded. This finding is potentially illustrated by the large number of foreign fighters who have mobilized from Europe and other economically developed countries. It is striking, for example, that the United Kingdom, Germany, and France are among the “top 15” providers of foreign fighters to the Islamic State (refer back to Table 1). One of the British foreign fighters highlighted in the introduction to this article – Jihadi John, the Kuwaiti-born, London-raised British citizen who gained international notoriety in Islamic State videos in which he beheaded hostages in the Syrian desert – was described by his former boss in *The Guardian* as a “stellar” 21-year-old salesman who nonetheless “disappeared” (i.e., he left to fight for the Islamic State) in April 2010 after returning to the United Kingdom. A second foreign fighter referenced in our introduction, Abu Omar the American, worked as a bank teller in Alexandria, Virginia, before traveling to join the Islamic State in December 2015. These two examples are illustrative of the fact that something besides poverty and unemployment are driving foreign fighters to the Islamic State.

The statistical analysis also demonstrates that political, regime type-inspired grievances (i.e., a country’s level of authoritarianism or democracy) are unimportant regarding the number of foreign fighters sent by that country (hypothesis #4). In other words, higher levels of authoritarianism do not lead to higher numbers of foreign fighters, and higher levels of democratization do not lead to lower numbers of foreign fighters. This finding contradicts our hypothesis that authoritarian political systems, unlike their democratic counterparts, do not

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accommodate public (or private) airing of political grievances, and are thus more likely to see higher levels of discontent and therefore higher levels of radicalization and foreign fighting. This finding nonetheless has been corroborated by statistical analyses of foreign fighters to ISIS.\(^{86}\)

Moreover, as noted in a recent comparative analysis of foreign fighters to ISIS from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia, the political issue is not so much one of regime type as it is the nature of state-Islamist relations. Specifically, when “state-Islamists relations are negotiated and controlled,” as in the cases of Tunisia and Saudi Arabia, “national jihad is likely to be restrained and Islamic grievances and rage may be channeled to other, transnational arenas” (i.e., to ISIS and the civil war in Syria).\(^{87}\)

A third grievance-related finding is that educational attainment (hypothesis #3) is statistically significant (.01 level), but in the opposite expected direction: foreign fighters hail from countries where levels of educational attainment are high. This finding nonetheless makes intuitive sense. One can argue that it requires significant intelligence (i.e., educational attainment) to both leave one’s country and to covertly work through international channels to obtain entry into an active conflict zone. This process might include making contact with Islamic State recruiters from a would-be foreign fighter’s home country, gaining access to legitimate and/or falsified documents such as passports and visas, boarding flights to nearby countries (such as Turkey) that border the conflict zone, and then meeting local contacts on the ground to negotiate land entry into Syria or Iraq. This argument is reinforced by recent studies that

\(^{86}\) See Benmelech and Klor (2018) and Pokalova (2019).

demonstrate that a disproportionate share of violent Islamist extremists, including foreign fighters, have post-graduate degrees, most notably in the sciences field of engineering.  

88 The statistical analysis further demonstrates that grievances in and of themselves are insufficient to explain the foreign fighter phenomenon. We must instead turn to our two political opportunity hypotheses for a more complete understanding. In this regard, it is noteworthy that internet access (hypothesis #6) is not a statistically significant predictor of foreign fighting. This is surprising due to the fact that the Islamic State has been able to creatively use the internet to deploy propaganda, including maintaining online messaging forums and publishing a widely distributed and read online magazine (Dabiq), that were thought to encourage recruitment from abroad. Our statistical analysis demonstrates that at least this latter point is unfounded. Despite the hype surrounding online recruitment, the internet has not acted as a new, successful repertoire of contention, at least in terms of Islamic State recruitment of foreign fighters. Foreign fighters instead are recruited in their countries of origin via personal links, typically through family and friends who are local supporters of the Islamic State, including individuals from the local community who have already traveled to fight for the Islamic State.

Our second measure of political opportunity – domestic political instability (hypothesis #5) – serves as a significant (.01 level) predictor of foreign fighting. Our findings indicate that a 1-unit increase in domestic political instability predicts a roughly 78 percent increase \[((1.777 – 1) * (100))] in foreign fighter totals. This finding emphasizes the powerful role that the situational context plays in collective action and is potentially indicative of the costs associated with rapid political change. The basic proposition found in the literature is that actors respond to opportunities, with various forms of domestic political instability signaling that the time is ripe

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for mobilization. Two mechanisms are critical. First, domestic political instability is a sign of declining regime control, which signals to foreign fighters that they are more able to move freely within and across the borders of their country. Second, domestic political instability also enables potential foreign fighters to coordinate more freely with each other and with international recruitment networks.\textsuperscript{89}

Tunisia, where the Arab Spring began and which now serves as the second largest contributor of foreign fighters to the Islamic State (2,588 foreign fighters), is an outstanding example. On December 17, 2010, a 26-year-old fruit vendor from Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, Tarek al-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi (or Mohamed Bouazizi for short), performed an act of self-immolation in protest against his unfair treatment by police in his local governorship. The event captured the attention of many young Tunisians who had only known authoritarian rule. The subsequent protests inspired by Bouazizi’s act not only led to the overthrow of the Ben Ali dictatorship on January 14, 2011 but it created a domino effect with protests spreading throughout the region leading to the overthrow of the Mubarak dictatorship in Egypt and the Qaddafi dictatorship in Libya later that same year. Most important, the Tunisian Revolution led to a six-year period of domestic political instability, as the country was racked by three successive terrorist attacks in 2015, at the Bardo Museum (March 2015), a beach resort in Sousse (June 2015), and on Avenue Habib Bourguiba in Tunis (November 2015), which severely hampered Tunisia’s tourism economy and forced the country to institute a “state of emergency” which increased popular unrest. The country also witnessed the emergence of insurgencies on its eastern and western borders as a result of a growing militant presence in both Libya and Algeria, the former of which served as a hub for transitioning foreign fighters to Syria. The one-two

\textsuperscript{89} Schumacher and Schraeder (2019a; 2019b).
punch of domestic political instability during a six-year period (2010-15) and being a neighbor to one of the global transit hubs for foreign fighters (Libya) partially explains why Tunisia emerged as the greatest foreign fighter contributor to the Islamic State.\(^9\) In short, political opportunity, particularly that driven by domestic political instability, is important to understanding the foreign fighter phenomenon.

The statistical analysis nonetheless demonstrates that understanding the foreign fighter phenomenon is not complete without reference to social networks. Whereas the higher the percentage of a country’s population that is Muslim is a statistically significant predictor of foreign fighting (hypothesis #7), whether or not a country’s population is predominantly Arab is not (hypothesis #8). This finding is consistent with the fact that the Islamic State is a religiously-based organization that has attracted foreign fighters regardless of race, ethnicity, or culture, as long as they are Muslims. There is not a single documented case of a non-Muslim foreign fighter for the Islamic State. This finding is also consistent with Malet’s typology\(^9\) of foreign fighter conflicts that classifies those who are fighting for the Islamic State as driven by a radical Salafi ideology, and not ethnicity. The finding is statistically significant at the .01 level though the magnitude is rather small; a 1-unit increase in a country’s percentage Muslim population predicts a 7 percent increase in foreign fighters. This finding suggests that it would be incorrect to portray Islam as the core factor driving foreign fighter involvement, even in a conflict with an Islamic dimension such as the Syrian civil war.

**Conclusion**


This project examined the state-level effects of the global foreign fighter phenomenon, in which individuals fight in a foreign conflict. We specifically explored the question – “Why do ordinary people travel abroad to fight and potentially die for a foreign cause?” – by analyzing a dataset of 27,223 foreign fighters from 75 countries who fought for the Islamic State. Although there is a tendency in the literature to emphasize one body of theory in explaining a particular form of collective action, our statistical analysis confirms that a robust understanding of Islamic State foreign fighters must by necessity draw on grievance, political opportunity, and social network theories. Our analysis demonstrates that foreign fighters hail from countries with higher levels of education (grievance theory) that are also experiencing some form of domestic political instability, indicative of the role of political opportunity in collective action. We also find that foreign fighters are more likely to come from countries that are predominantly Muslim, illustrating the importance of social networks. These results potentially establish foreign fighting as an act that is distinct among different types of collective action, with implications for both policymakers and theory development.

The most significant results involve the impacts of domestic political instability on the foreign fighter question. The policy implication of these results is that the western democracies need to take a hard look at the core assumptions of international democracy promotion efforts and especially the unintended consequences associated with recently transitioned democracies (such as Tunisia) experiencing some form of domestic political instability, ranging from democratization to worst case scenarios of authoritarian backlash, state collapse, and internal conflict. In worst-case scenarios in which a political transition has led to a complete breakdown in central authority and the intensification of internal civil conflict, as in the case of the Libyan civil war that followed the Western overthrow in 2011 of the authoritarian regime of Muammar
el-Qaddafi, ungoverned territory can become an important source of foreign fighters as Libya has become the hub for foreign fighters transitioning into Syria. In short, our analysis demonstrates that there are important and as of yet unintended consequences of political transitions, including those undertaken in the name of international democracy promotion, which may force policymakers to look toward establishing and maintaining stability and order over democratization, limiting future opportunities for this type of mass foreign fighter mobilization. This is a finding that warrants further empirical examination.

An additional finding that warrants future investigation is the surprising role education plays in driving the foreign fighter phenomenon. The finding that higher levels of education within a country leads to higher numbers of foreign fighters runs contrary to the hypothesized relationship identified in the collective action literature. This suggests that there is something potentially unique about foreign fighting as a collective act. One possible explanation in the case of the Islamic State’s foreign fighters is that there is a new class of educated Muslims who have economic opportunities, but who are driven to participate in radical forms of collective action such as foreign fighting due to increasing levels of discrimination and Islamophobia that they as immigrants face in their new homes, many of which have been marked by anti-immigrant populist movements. The most recent global manifestations of this anti-immigrant political wave include the Brexit vote, the victory of Italy’s Five Star Movement in Italy, the Trump administration, and the election of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in Hungary. This is a finding that warrants further exploration.

Our study also suggests two areas for future study. The first would be to code comparable data for other cases of foreign fighters to see if our hypotheses hold up in conflicts with and without an Islamic dimension, over space and time. For example, is our finding related to Islam,
which focuses on religion, only applicable to conflicts with an Islamic dimension, or does religion play a role in other conflicts as well? Or, do we need to reconceptualize religion, and particularly the radical Islamist theology of the Islamic State, as ideology? An excellent comparative case study, for which abundant archival evidence exists, is the Spanish civil war (1936-39). A second area for future study would be to test for individual-level effects by conducting surveys. The goal would be assessing whether the state-level conclusions generated by this study remain valid at the individual level. Indeed, the use of state-level data to generate conclusions about why “individuals” fight in foreign conflicts is the greatest shortcoming of this study, which nonetheless provides an important, theoretically-driven first step of a larger two-step project that will focus on individual-level characteristics. One of the ideal case studies for such individual-level analysis would be Tunisia, which has emerged as the only Arab democracy that nonetheless serves as the largest contributor of Islamic State foreign fighters.
# Foreign Fighters to the Islamic State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>AVERAGE ESTIMATE</th>
<th>LOW ESTIMATE</th>
<th>HIGH ESTIMATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>2,622</td>
<td>3,244</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>2,588</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>2,284</td>
<td>3,417</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>2,250</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>1,580</td>
<td>1,660</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1,555</td>
<td>1,910</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1,050</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbajan</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>745</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>915</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>850</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>650</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>528</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>330</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>280</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>27,223</td>
<td>33,777</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Average, low and, high estimates of foreign fighters by country from the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence and the Soufan Group.
Table 2
Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Obs.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average FF Total</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>141.05</td>
<td>413.72</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low FF Total</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>97.98</td>
<td>269.88</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High FF Total</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>175.01</td>
<td>528.10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3,417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty level\text{log}</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>9.1449</td>
<td>1.1813</td>
<td>6.4692</td>
<td>11.7708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>8.6563</td>
<td>6.1048</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>31.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>0.6258</td>
<td>0.1734</td>
<td>0.2003</td>
<td>0.9576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of democracy</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>4.1214</td>
<td>6.0630</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Political Instability\text{log}</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>5.1997</td>
<td>3.1318</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10.9981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet access</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>40.409</td>
<td>28.752</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>96.7872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim solidarity</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>25.008</td>
<td>36.884</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>99.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab solidarity</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>0.0777</td>
<td>0.2684</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Proximity to Damascus\text{log}</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>7.6576</td>
<td>1.3656</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.1040</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: FF = foreign fighter
Table 3
Negative Binomial Regression Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1) Foreign Fighters (Average)</th>
<th>(2) Foreign Fighters (Low)</th>
<th>(3) Foreign Fighters (High)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Std. Error)</td>
<td>(Std. Error)</td>
<td>(Std. Error)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grievance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1: Poverty level (\log)</td>
<td>1.453 (0.539)</td>
<td>1.717 (0.550)</td>
<td>1.321 (0.537)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: Unemployment</td>
<td>.976 (.0295)</td>
<td>.971 (.0335)</td>
<td>.980 (.0299)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3: Education level</td>
<td>442885.5*** (2.551)</td>
<td>282693*** (2.790)</td>
<td>599144.1*** (2.501)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political Opportunity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5: Domestic political instability (\log)</td>
<td>1.777*** (.0967)</td>
<td>1.756*** (.0991)</td>
<td>1.790*** (.0967)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6: Internet access</td>
<td>1.014 (.0165)</td>
<td>1.003 (.0170)</td>
<td>1.019 (.0164)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Network</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7: Muslim solidarity</td>
<td>1.066*** (.00825)</td>
<td>1.061*** (.00798)</td>
<td>1.069*** (.00844)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H8: Arab solidarity</td>
<td>.292 (.840)</td>
<td>.535 (.867)</td>
<td>.208* (.843)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Proximity to Damascus (\log)</td>
<td>1.108 (.112)</td>
<td>1.159 (.109)</td>
<td>1.078 (.118)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-14.91*** (4.169)</td>
<td>-16.05*** (4.175)</td>
<td>-14.27*** (4.222)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald test (\chi^2)</td>
<td>184.22***</td>
<td>171.90***</td>
<td>186.49***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data come from the average, low, and high estimates of foreign fighters by country from the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence and the Soufan Group; dependent variable is the total number of foreign fighters from a country; the coefficients given in the table are incidence-rate ratios where values greater than 1 indicate a positive relationship and values less than 1 indicate a negative relationship; robust standard errors in parentheses; *** \(p<0.01\), ** \(p<0.05\), * \(p<0.1\).