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# Differences Between Actors and Leaders in Terrorism

By Allie Curtright

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## Introduction

This research seeks to identify and examine key differences between those that commit terrorist acts (actors) and those who organize, plan, and lead terrorist organizations (leaders). The key differences examined for this UCARE research session are: education and age. In summation, my research is exploring whether actors and leaders differ in their age and education levels.

The research I have conducted is important for several reasons. First is that research of this nature is largely absent from the current literature on terrorism. Most literature examining the traits of terrorists focuses on examining socio-economic factors related to terrorism. <sup>1</sup> Other literature that examines terrorist traits have smaller samples sizes than my research and focus on a very specific area or group. <sup>2,3</sup> The second reason that this research is important is the having this level of information on terrorists and terrorist organization structure is vital for counter-terrorism. <sup>4</sup>

The research question that I am seeking to answer is "Are leaders of terrorist groups likely to be older and have a higher degree of institutional education than the actors who carry out acts of political violence?" My hypothesis is that leaders will be older and will have obtained a higher degree of institutional education than those who commit acts of political violence.

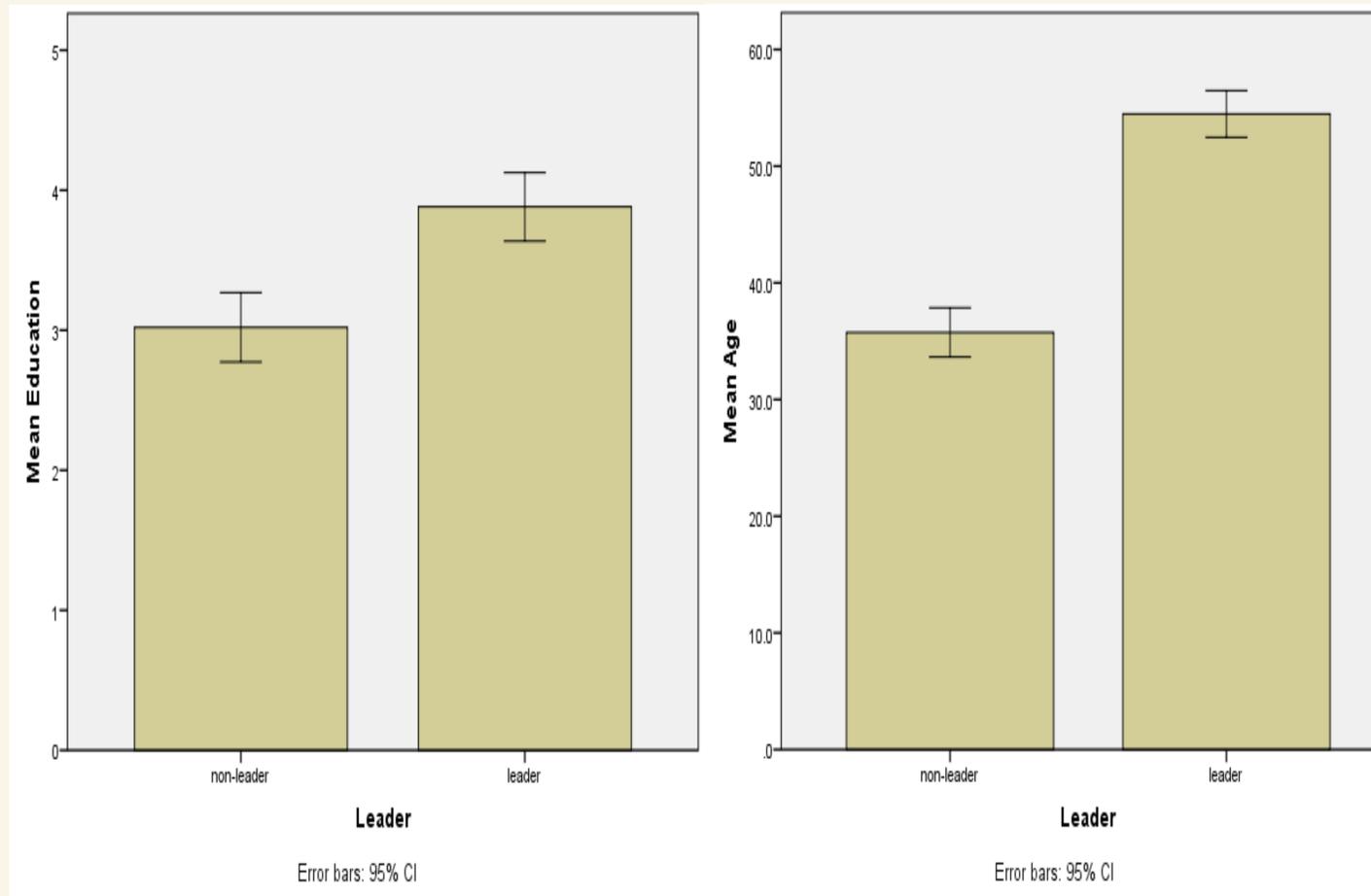
## Approach

The approach that I took with this research starts with the collection of data. The data was collected by myself and two other research assistants over the course of two years. The data for this project was obtained from a variety of databases, including the University of Maryland START Terrorism database and FBI records. Further information was gathered from a variety of news sources.

Analyzing the data began with the coding. For education the coding was as follows: 1-Below Secondary, 2- Secondary, 3-Some Postsecondary, 4- Postsecondary, 5- Masters, 6- Doctoral. I used several statistical tests to see if the differences between leaders and actors are statistically significant. First I did a difference of means test for both age and education. Then I utilized a Chi Square to account for the fact that the education variable is ordinal rather than continuous. I also did two permutation tests (Z and Chi Square) to account for the fact that the data is not a random sample.

## Graphs and Tables

Group Statistics					
	Leader	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Age	non-leader	230	35.752	16.2310	1.0702
	leader	221	54.480	15.1191	1.0170
Education	non-leader	96	3.02	1.222	.125
	leader	118	3.88	1.341	.123



## Results

- Age Results
  - Difference of Means Test
    - t= 12.67
    - p< .000
- Education Results
  - Difference of Means Test
    - t= 4.85
    - p< .000
  - Cross Tab for Ordinal Data
    - Chi Square= 27.54
    - p<.000
  - Permutation Tests
    - Z-Test= 10.88
    - Chi Square= 27.5
    - For both p< .000

## Conclusion

The conclusions that can be drawn from these results are that terrorist leaders are likely to be more educated and older than the actors who carry out political violence. These findings support my hypothesis.

There are several potential issues with my findings that provide for future research. First would be my sample size. Although my sample size is the largest that has ever been used for this type of research, it would be highly beneficial to have more data points. The second issue is that my data is not a random sample. This is due to the fact that data on terrorism is constrained by what information is made public. I attempted to solve this issue by doing the permutation tests but it is still a potential problem with my results. I myself plan to do more research on differences between terrorist leaders and actors.

## References

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