

Assassinations as an Insurgent Tactic:

Targeted Killing in the North Caucasus

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Abstract

This paper seeks to contribute to the further understanding of how assassinations are used as a terrorist tactic by insurgent groups, focusing specifically on groups in Chechnya and Dagestan. From analysing which types of people have been targeted in the North Caucasus between 1992-2018 we can conclude that those who were designated as government employees and police officers were the most frequently killed, based on recurring themes of resentment and need for retaliation against these target groups. In Dagestan it was found that ideology played a key role in target preference as many civilians were targeted based on their alternative practices and religious figures were targeted for their views. The context within which these assassination events take place is crucial to understanding the patterns of targeting. This paper identifies differences in targeting preference between groups in Chechnya and those in Dagestan, indicating how the socio-political and economic environment surrounding perpetrators can influence the type of people who are favoured and deemed 'necessary' to be killed for the said perpetrator's goals.

1.0 Introduction

Assassinations have been used for centuries as a means of achieving the political goals of the individual, the state or the non-state group. The late 19th to early 20th century has been dubbed the 'Golden Age of Assassination' where groups such as The People's Will (Narodnaya Volya) of Russia, employed targeted killing as a means of disrupting the status quo. In particular the targeting of Tsar Alexander II, condemning the ruler to death for 'crimes against the people' had a considerable impact on Russian politics and social stability (Andrew, 2018: 425). During the 'Golden Age', despite the relatively few deaths compared to the standards of 21st century terrorist attacks, there was still an unprecedented number of heads of state, government officials and political figures who were killed in this time. In studies of terrorism, civilians are seen to be the main target of political violence, particularly for political, nationalist or religious ends. However, is this the case for assassinations? Who are the main targets of this form of political violence, and how does the context within which the victim and perpetrator sits influence how often it is used?

This paper uses the Caucasus, which has seen a vast amount of political change and instability over the past century, as the backdrop for such questions to be asked. Russia's North Caucasus in particular has seen an incredibly concentrated level of violence after the fall of the Soviet Union with both the first and second Chechen wars, separatist insurgent movements throughout its

republics and with the rise of Islamic extremism across the region, culminating in the Caucasus Emirate. Russian institutions have been a topic of great interest for academics with regard to their use of assassinations and targeted violence both internally and internationally. However, the aim of this paper is to focus instead on how specifically non-state actors such as insurgent groups in the North Caucasus choose their targets. What aspects of the target make them suitable for the perpetrator? And, how does this change depending on the wider environment within which both the insurgent and target sit?

First, this paper seeks to frame the phenomena within contemporary approaches to security studies, ultimately taking a critical approach, using environmental criminology as the base framework for analysis. Rational actor and routine activities theories are posited as the primary pillars for understanding the phenomenon as a criminal event with facilitating environmental factors. This paper however, focuses on one particular element of routine activities theory, specifically that of the 'Suitable Target' and which environmental drivers facilitate an individual to be chosen as such. Next, the research methods are outlined, followed by the introduction to the chosen cases of Chechnya and Dagestan, examining their shared history. These cases are then compared based on findings pertaining to the rate of killing, and target types in order to comprehend the contextual factors that facilitate target preference.

2.0 Assassinations and political violence

2.1 Framing the phenomenon

This paper assumes that our conceptions about security are closely linked to our ideas about political life and therefore acknowledges the subjectivities within which the writer sits; a white woman from a democratic Western state within the International Relations field of academia. Moreover, a critical stance attempts to forgo state-centric 'totalising analyses of power relations' and instead attempts to understand civil conflicts, insurgencies and the use of political violence, to be situated within a complex web of interrelated factors which influences and motivates the use or non-use of violence (Smyth, 2007: 262). A critical approach seeks to avoid exceptionalising the human experience, acknowledging that violence is a common experience, however it also seeks to understand the unique context within which violence or 'insecurity' is brought upon the individual.

There is very little literature on the topic of the use of assassinations in insurgencies however, a few researchers have studied terrorist assassinations, focusing on the impact they have on institutional change in repressive regimes (Bell, 2019), how assassinations are used as a terrorist tactic (Mandala, 2017), how to prevent terrorist assassinations (Mandala & Freilich, 2017; Mandala & Freilich, 2018), the rationale of political assassinations (Perliger, 2015). and more commonly how assassinations fit within terrorism (Snitch, 1982; George, 1988; Pinfari, 2009). Academics have debated fiercely as to which variables constitute assassinations and terrorism respectively. With

assassinations, there has been a call to acknowledge that the target must be an 'influential' individual whose death would 'alter the normal course of events' (Cooper, 2009: 229). Others argue it is the political nature of the killing rather than the status of the target which can classify their death as an assassination instead of a murder (Iqbal and Zorn, 2006: 490). S. F. Pratt emphasises the importance of semantics stating that a definition of terrorism must refer to the specificity of the targeting, as oppose to the use of the term 'deliberate' in other common definitions, as the act itself is a rational decision by the actor to give a specific individual the label of 'target' (2015: 6). The definition as presented by Nachman Ben-Yehuda provides a cohesive definition which emphasises how the term is socially constructed and the subjectivity of how it is used by both the actor and those naming an assassination as such. Ben-Yehuda defines a political assassination as a '*rhetorical device which is used to socially construct and interpret (that is, to make a culturally meaningful account of) the discriminate, deliberate, intentional and serious (attempt(s), whether successful or not, to kill a specific social actor for political reasons having something to do with the political position (or role of the victim), his symbolic-moral universe, and with the symbolic-moral universe out of which the assassin/s act(s)*', and it is this universe which '*generates legitimacy and justification required to act, which is usually presented in quasi-legal terms*' (1990: 348). This definition is chosen both for how it focuses on the deliberateness and intentional nature of attempts on an individual's life by the perpetrator, which is based on the perpetrator's perspective of that individual within their own subjective 'symbolic-moral universe', but also for including unsuccessful attempts in the definition, allowing for and expanding the analysis of assassinations to understand what makes them successful and unsuccessful.

Terrorism is a concept which has warranted a large amount of academic debate over the years. This paper will not go in depth into the different sides of this debate as there are many who have covered it in greater detail and with more time and space to do so (Weinburg et al. 2004; Hoffman, 2017). Terrorism is often employed by insurgent groups as a means of intimidating the incumbent forces, and in some cases despite the differences between the typologies of both groups, terrorist groups and insurgent groups can operate in tandem (Boyle, 2010: 336). In the cases that will be outlined in the following sections, assassinations are understood to be used as a terrorist tactic by secessionist and Islamic insurgent groups where the '*threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence*' is used '*to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation*' (GTD, 2019). This tactic operates as part of a wider repertoire of tactics such as guerrilla warfare, informational and psychological warfare commonly associated with insurgencies (Hoffman, 2017: 37). For this paper it is appropriate to use the definition of terrorism as utilised by the Global Terrorism Database as it is this definition which was used in the collection process for the majority of the data and therefore should be used for the analysis, for analytical consistency. Moreover, this definition does not isolate civilians and non-combatants as the only possible type of target, presenting a more realistic view that these groups are not the only ones that can be targeted in order for the act to be labelled as 'terrorism'. This paper understands insurgency to be a 'protracted violent conflict' where one or more groups 'seek to overthrow or fundamentally change the political or social

order in a state or region' through the sustained use of 'violence, subversion, social disruption, and political action' (Kim & Blank, 2013: 918).

There are many who do not believe that assassinations can be considered as a terroristic insurgent tactic mainly due to the selection of targets not being a random process, which in earlier discussions on terrorism has been a required element in definitions. However, more recent discussions on terrorism tend not to focus on this element at all (Weinerg et al. 2004: 781) . With this lack of random selection, some believe that 'an assassination cannot be considered as aimed at spreading fear in a wider public, but rather at warning it' (Pinfari, 2009: 589). A target is killed based on the fact that they 'allegedly bear some form of individual responsibility' and therefore their death comes as a warning to others (Pinfari, 2009: 589). However, assassinations should and could be considered as an act of terror, similar to terrorist attacks they can add to a culture of fear through the brutality of the methods used. The scale of many attacks which have taken place in Chechnya and Dagestan, through the use of firearms and explosives, are tantamount to a terrorist attack, due to their brutality and with many bringing large scale collateral damage. Moreover, many would disagree with the study of assassinations as a separate entity within the campaign of political violence conducted by insurgents, as it would just be considered a method of guerrilla warfare or tactic within a conflict. However, many of the assassination events perpetrated between 1992 and 2018 in Chechnya and Dagestan have taken place outside of times of direct conflict, and therefore cannot be considered a method of war. Moreover, the use of assassinations as a form of communication by insurgents is conducive of a terrorist act due to the use of violence to attain a particular goal.

2.2 Theoretical framework

In previous studies of terrorist assassinations, environmental criminology has been cited as a useful tool for framing how assassination events occur. Environmental criminology is based on the idea that certain conditions must be met for a crime to take place and further emphasises the salience of understanding the individuality of certain contexts and the subsequent unique impact they may have on offenders. The two main theoretical perspectives referenced in environmental criminology are rational choice theory and routine activities theory.

Rational choice theory assumes that criminal offenders are rational in their decision making and therefore weigh the benefits and the costs of their actions before committing a crime (Mandala & Freilich, 2018: 1518). Routine activities theory originated with Cohen and Felson (1979) who saw crime 'as an opportunistic act that only benefits the offender' (Schreck, 2017: 117). In routine activities theory it is predicated that three elements must come together for a crime to take place; a *motivated offender*, a *suitable target* and a *lack of a capable guardian* around said target. Literature on assassinations rarely discusses the suitability of targets according to different perpetrators as it is often assumed that only those who hold some form of political or social importance would be targeted, such as heads of state. This discourages any examination of variations in targeting

preferences and how this changes depending on context. Therefore, the focus of this paper is to examine specifically the factors that make a target *suitable*. In routine activities theory it is theorised that an 'attractive target' must be in reach of a motivated offender for a crime to take place, they are visible and relatively accessible to the offender, with a lack of effective protection or ability to detect a threat (Schreck, 2017: 119-120). The author would also argue that a suitable target has a form of value attached to them and their death, in that the perpetrator must see value in killing them.

It can be assumed that the suitable target is someone who is deemed worth killing, as a form of revenge or that their death brings about some form of change or impact on others. The suitability of a target is arguably inextricably linked to the motivations of the actors as it is this factor combined with their assumed rational decision making which allocates an individual as necessary to be targeted. Moreover, a target's suitability is linked to their accessibility or their *lack of a capable guardian*. By studying the targets chosen by groups in Chechnya and Dagestan between 1992 and 2018 we can attempt to understand the facilitating factors in the decision making process; where *suitable targets* are chosen. When looking at assassinations more generally, and not just within the context of insurgencies, civil war and state instability; systemic social issues and chronic poverty could create an environment which perpetuates misery and discontent, and therefore creates the perfect environment for this form of political violence to flourish. Therefore, an important adjustment which needs to be made to this theory is the acknowledgement of the underlying, and arguably systemic, factors that can facilitate all three elements of the routine activities' framework; hereafter referred to as environmental drivers. Marissa Mandala (2017) found that 'countries that violate physical integrity rights by torturing, abruptly executing, and imprisoning their citizens for political beliefs could provide an environment that fosters terrorism' (2017: 32). An environment that engenders and systematises violence against ethnic groups or individuals with specific religious or political beliefs fosters resentment and a need for retaliation against those who instigate this environment i.e. government officials, police officials, military etc. Thereby creating both the *motivation* to assassinate and the *suitable targets*.

The suitable target element of this framework is ultimately the crux of what makes an assassination, as without the purposeful targeting of an individual an assassination cannot be described as such. Therefore, the focus of this paper is the *suitable target* aspect. To understand how individuals can put a value on another's death we must understand; what makes an individual a suitable target and how much the environment influences who is deemed a *suitable target* to the insurgent?

2.3 Research Method

In combination with its use of academic literature on the theoretical and historical elements of the phenomenon, this paper also relies on assassination event data drawn primarily from the Global Terrorism Database, with data from the RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents as well as

from news articles and books. Events which took place in Russia between 1992-2018 were taken from these sources and compiled into a master database on SPSS. Firstly, this particular period was chosen as there have been very few studies which analyse assassination event data in this time period, therefore providing a unique perspective for analysis. Secondly, this period represents a particularly interesting time in the Caucasus's history with shifts in the balance of power regionally, political instability and violent conflict from Russia's attempts to prevent the rise of secessionist movements. Chechnya and Dagestan were chosen as the case studies to compare as both republics have the highest concentration of violence throughout the region in the selected time period. Both Chechnya and Dagestan had the highest frequency of assassinations in this time period out of all of the North Caucasian republics. Moreover, the intensity of violence in both regions changed overtime, providing an interesting perspective in how shifts in the socio-political, economic, and cultural environment can account for a greater concentration of assassinations. It is essential to stress that the data collected is only the known or recorded cases, other assassinations may have taken place in this time that haven't been recorded or designated as such. This paper also takes the suggestion from Kirkham, Levi and Crotty that individual assassinations should be labelled as 'assassination events' in order to include both unsuccessful and successful attempts in the analysis, and hereafter this paper will refer to events as such (1970: 347).

3.0 Assassinations in the North Caucasus: A comparative case study on target suitability in Chechnya and Dagestan

3.1 A Connected History: The Cases of Chechnya and Dagestan

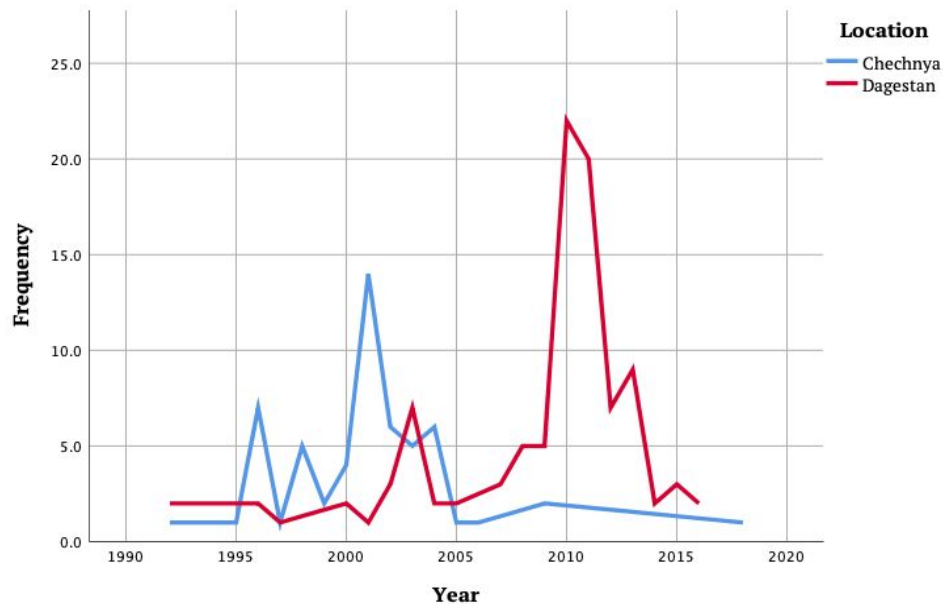
Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, nationalist movements in the North Caucasus, who had long been fighting for independence, started to gain momentum and many Chechens had designs on establishing their independence from Russia. However, when the then President, Boris Yeltsin, preemptively struck the region with military force in order to prevent secession, violence erupted. The First Chechen War (1994-1996) was riddled with indiscriminate violence, including Russian bombing creating mass casualties. The indiscriminate violence committed by the Russian military accentuated grievances within the population and helped spur the Chechen insurgency. Moreover, the use of guerrilla warfare and terrorism by insurgents enabled them to withstand Russian advancement leading to a cease-fire, giving Chechnya 'nominal autonomy' (King & Menon, 2010: 26). The conflict also led to warlords and politicians adopting a more radical version of Islam (Salafism) which spread rapidly throughout Chechnya, leading to the more radical Islamisation of the Chechen separatist movement. The Sufi-oriented leader Akhmad Kadyrov was persecuted by fundamentalists, leading to a number of assassination attempts against him, and in turn potentially the reason for his support of Russian forces in 1999, leading to his appointment as 'head of the Russian Chechen administration' by Moscow (Roshchin, 2004: 96). Local affairs were turned over to Moscow approved leaders who had switched sides in the conflicts, which is now termed the process of Chechenisation. The 1999 incursion into Dagestan was carried out by a group of radical Chechen and

Dagestani militants, led by Ibn al-Khattab and Shamil Basayev (Roshchin, 2004: 98). They sought the unification of both regions under their radical interpretation of Islam and the incursion is seen as one of the triggers of the Second Chechen War (1999-2009) (Wilhelmsen, 2005: 43). The conflict was also heavily influenced by Putin's concern with 'stamping out terrorism', which had been 'directed against local politicians and security personnel who were allied with Moscow'; with the events of 9/11 reinforcing his aims of securitising the Muslim population (King & Menon, 2010: 27). This then shifted in 2009, when Islamic insurgents from Chechnya invaded Dagestan declaring it an Islamic state, turning a relatively peaceful region into a 'full guerrilla war zone' (International Crisis Group, 2016: 1). In 2007, the conflicts in the area had already transformed into a region-wide radical Islamic movement, part of the 'global jihad' and labelled the Caucasus Emirate (CE) (International Crisis Group, 2012:13). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, 'severe economic decline, rising poverty' and unemployment rates combined with high birth rates and 'significant flows of refugees' can also be considered influential factors contributing to the perpetuation of violence in both regions, particularly in Dagestan (Sagramoso, 2007: 685). These factors can potentially further explain the appeal of extremist Islamic ideologies, especially to the younger parts of the population, as it provided a means of expressing grievances over the socio-political and economic situation in the region (2007: 686). Based on this evidence we can understand that the political milieu of both republics' is a great, if not the greatest, contributor to the perpetuation of violence in the respective regions. However, is this the case when trying to explain the frequency of assassinations?

3.2 Frequency of attacks

When trying to understand the impact of the context within which these attacks took place, understanding the history, as briefly outlined above, can elucidate upon the facilitating factors. As can be seen in Chart 1 the frequency of assassinations mirrors that of the intensity of the conflict at that time. The first peak in Chart 1 represents seven assassinations which took place in 1996 at the end of the First Chechen War and the second peak reflects the start of the Second Chechen War in 2001. We can see that the number of assassinations which took place in Dagestan were much fewer than Chechnya until 2009 when the number of attacks increased, peaking in 2010 at 22. The violence peaked in Chechnya in 1996 and 2001, in the First and Second Chechen Wars, and petered out after 2005, with the appointment of Ramzan Kadyrov as Prime Minister and then President of a newly established and stronger regional government. The violence then peaked in Dagestan in 2010, following the degradation of Dagestani politics through corruption and nepotism and the harsh policies of the police in the 'Wahhabist Hunt'; which will be expanded upon in the following section. However, this chart also shows that assassinations were still used across the entire time period in both regions, with at least one or two assassination taking place every year. This also demonstrates that this form of attack does not only take place when the conflict or intensity of violence is at its peak.

Chart 1. *Frequency of Assassinations in Chechnya and Dagestan from 1992-2018*



3.3. Target Types

If we look at the data in Table 1 we can see that in both Chechnya and Dagestan targets who are classified as ‘Government (General)’ are the most frequently targeted from 1992-2018. The targeting of government officials sends the strongest message, intending to strike fear by targeting those who have the most power. In both regions, there was resentment towards local, regional and national government institutions, for not only the use of violence against their respective populations but also for their lack of ability to maintain economic stability or to reduce unemployment and poverty (Sagramoso, 2007: 690). Although economic underdevelopment and poverty may not be considered a root cause of terrorism or assassinations, it can be considered an indirect cause as ‘people tend to become resentful and disposed to violent political action when they share a sense that they have been deprived of economic opportunities or political advantages’ enjoyed by others (Sagramoso, 2007: 690; Gurr, 1970). Moreover, the indiscriminate use of violence in both conflicts in Chechnya reinforced resentment against Russian controlled institutions for both insurgents and the population in general. The punishment of families, ‘where many relatives [of insurgents, or secessionists] have had their homes and property burned by government security forces’ which solidified this resentment (International Crisis Group, 2012: 28). The strong sense of retaliation and blood revenge felt by insurgents in both Chechnya and Dagestan fuelled the need to punish those who have wronged their loved ones (Ratelle & Souleimanov, 2017). However, the need for revenge did not extend to just those who have committed these crimes such as the government security forces and the military, but also to those who administer such commands. As the government, and its officials, were seen to have the most control and power over such decisions to be made, it makes sense that they were the main targets in the region. The grievances held against Russian led systems of power were often combined

with an Islamic conservative sensibility in how retaliation in the form of jihad against these ‘corrupt’ officials, police forces and ‘pro-regime clergy’ was seen as a means of avenging the loss of ‘old-time values’ due to the sins of the elite who perpetuate corruption and nepotism (Ratelle & Souleimanov, 2017: 583-584). Therefore in this instance, religion can be drawn out as a driver in tandem with other socio-cultural conditions such as the state of the economy and political system, as it was the conditions perpetuated by government forces which spurred both the radicalisation of and the co-option of radical Islamic views with the respective insurgencies. Religion can also be seen as a cause for treatment by government officials and therefore retaliation in the name of their beliefs of which they have been punished for following can also be seen as a motivating factor.

Moreover, it can also be argued that religion can be used as a form of justification to rationalise their decision to attack certain groups. In Dagestan in particular any mistrust of elites within the state, were ‘usually framed strictly in terms of a sectarian clash between corrupt Muslims and pure Islam’ (Campana & Ratelle, 2014: 123). This mistrust of elites such as religious figures, arguably explains the targeting of local Muslim clerics, imams and muftis in both regions (however much more intensely in Dagestan). Resentment against these individuals has been cited to be based on their lack of support for violent measures used by militants, or for not adhering to stricter Salafist teachings (International Crisis Group, 2012: 9). However, clergymen were not the only victims of assassinations based on strong religious justification. Civilians, although typically conceptualised as the victim of terrorism and insurgency through the use of indiscriminate violence, or collateral damage, are shown to be the third most targeted group in Dagestan and among the most targeted in Chechnya for assassination events. Although there were relatively fewer ‘civilians’ who were targeted by insurgents compared to government officials and police officers a large proportion of civilians who were assassinated (or attempted to), were targeted based on claims that said individuals were engaged in magical practices or witchcraft. ‘Using or supporting magic’ is ‘categorically forbidden in Islam’ and can lead to automatic apostasy according to Wahhabism (Caucasian Knot, 2019a; Wiktorowicz, 2005: 82). In both Chechnya and Dagestan, individuals labelled as witches, psychics, sorcerers, witch doctors, healers and fortune tellers have been targeted based on their alternative practices. In Dagestan, 66% of civilians targeted were engaged in ‘magic’ or healing practices. In Chechnya no civilians were targeted on these grounds. The difference between the frequency of events in the two regions lies in the perpetrators. In Dagestan insurgents are seen to be responsible for the majority of attacks as an extension of their campaign of violence in attempts to instil their jihadist ideology, and to prevent ‘non-godly activity’ (Caucasian Knot, 2011). Whereas in Chechnya, anti-Magic campaigns were mainly conducted by authorities and law enforcement with the Islamic Alternative Medicine Centre in Grozny. In Chechnya, in 2010, 40 witches were arrested within two weeks, with some publicly denounced and shamed on national television. This has been argued that it is less to do with religious motives but state control, and as a means for the Kadryov regime to instil control and fear (Caucasian Knot, 2019a). Although the religious element is undeniable as it is the main justification for the arrests, many of these ‘witches’ in Chechnya were prosecuted for fraud

as law enforcement argued that many were using it as a means of tricking people out of their money or driving them away from their families. Many people turned to traditional and alternative religious and healing practices in the interwar periods due to fear and desperation, which could explain how more civilians came to practice it but also the higher rate of targeting as there were more people to be ‘cleansed’ for their sin (Caucasian Knot, 2019a).

Table 1. Relationship between location and target type

		Location			
		Chechnya		Dagestan	
		Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Target Type	Business	2	3.5	0	0
	Government (General)	39	67.3	41	41
	Journalists & Media	2	3.5	2	2
	Military	2	3.5	6	6
	NGO	2	3.5	0	0
	Police	5	8.6	29	29
	Private Citizens & Property	3	5.2	12	12
	Religious Figures/Institutions	3	5.2	10	10
	Total	58	100	100	100

The decision to target these specific individuals may also be considered a decision made out of convenience. Speckhard and Ahkmedova (2006) highlight that in between 2000 and 2001 Chechen terrorists ‘targeted only military bases and only inside Chechnya’, however, this changed as military targets became more secure within Chechnya and there was a ‘deepening [of] despair and anger in terrorist groups over their national situation’ (2006: 436). This is also confirmed in Chart 1 with the spike in attacks in 2001. Although many higher up government officials may have some form of security protection, lower level officials who do not have access to security teams and armoured vehicles are still relatively less secure and less capable of detecting or deterring attacks than military personnel. This also demonstrates the interconnectedness of the elements of the *suitable target* and *lack of a capable guardian*, as much of the decision making that goes into choosing a *suitable target* is based on accessibility to them. Despite a government official’s relative lack of security compared to military personnel, compared to other target types such as private citizens, journalists and police officers some officials are more secure. Table 3 (Appendix) shows how heads of state were not targeted as much as general personnel, which is arguably due to a lack of access and higher security measures that come with being a head of state. Table 2 (Appendix) shows that in both Chechnya and Dagestan that almost half of all assassination events which targeted government officials were unsuccessful. Therefore, indicating that despite the potential difficulty in targeting government

officials compared to police, journalists or private citizens, government officials are seen as a more valuable target, and therefore worth putting more effort in to ensure they are targeted, despite a potential lack of success.

When we look at how police were targeted in both regions, Dagestan is shown to have had significantly more assassination events which target the police than Chechnya. This is in line with how resentment grew in Dagestan, due to the arguably misguided crackdown by police on Islamic extremism where men, especially young men, who were suspected of being Salafists, (with suspicion often unfounded and only based on appearance), were arrested and interrogated by police. There is little evidence to suggest that the majority of those arrested actually held extreme Islamic views, however this 'Wahhabist Hunt' was enough to spark an increase in resentment, and subsequent violence, as those who were detained by police were often subjected to 'brutal torture' and were 'routinely beaten' (Ratelle & Souleimanov, 2017: 582). The targeting of police indicates the rationale behind the decision making of who to attack. "Honour" is an incredibly important element within Dagestani traditions and therefore to attack the police is a means of seeking 'retribution against the brutality of police forces' (Ratelle & Souleimanov, 2017: 582).

Ratelle and Souleimanov (2017) interviewed current fighters, former fighters and friends and relatives of fighters in Dagestani communities across Europe and Eurasia from 2004 to 2017. Their results demonstrated that there were several factors which motivated individuals to join Jihadist *jamaats*. 'The erosion of moral values, policy impunity, and rampant corruption' were cited as some of the main factors which influenced participation (Ratelle and Souleimanov, 2017: 579). This corroborates the idea that, especially for young people, to participate in the insurgency was a way of protesting against the socioeconomic conditions Dagestan was facing, along with the entrenched corruption and nepotism among elites. However, it is shown that the desire to avenge the wrongs committed against their communities by the police was one of the strongest factors motivating individuals to join. When we look at the data of the most frequently targeted types, we can see that in Dagestan, 29 members of the police and security forces were purposefully targeted from the mid-2000s, compared to Chechnya's five. This discrepancy is potentially due to counter terrorism measures in Chechnya taking a militaristic approach in the form of the Second Chechen War. Where if retaliation was sought by insurgents, it would be conducted through guerrilla warfare and alternative terrorist tactics against Russian forces. Moreover, the strict and brutal regime now headed by Ramzan Kadyrov provides little room for retaliation, and if there is dissent then militants are subjected to assassinations themselves, albeit state sponsored (King & Menon, 2010: 28). Dagestan differs in this regard, as despite clashes between combined Russian and Dagestani forces and militants, counter extremism measures conducted by law enforcement were more prominent. An interesting finding is that the majority of those targeted for assassination were officials who were higher up within the police force including police chiefs, task force commanders, Captains, Colonels, Senior Lieutenants, and those leading counter extremism departments. Instead of those who directly

arrest individuals, as part of the 'Wahhabist hunt'; it is those who directed the policy who were targeted. These officials were seen as perpetuating the state of corruption and suffering in Dagestan, and therefore were deemed *suitable* and *necessary* to target. Based on the framework it could be argued that these law enforcement officials had been systematically targeted in response to their own policies, therefore in some way these officials made themselves *suitable targets* for insurgents to attack. This is not to say that lower level police officers have not been targeted and killed but the means by which these higher-level officials have been targeted and assassinated demonstrates a deep resentment towards these institutions beyond the immediate revenge against lower level officers who instigate the policy. In some cases, police officers, however, have also been targeted and potentially as a means of spreading fear in those higher up in law enforcement. The 2003 assassination of police driver Salikh Shamkhalov and his pregnant wife is particularly extreme in how it was conducted; thirty-three shotgun rounds were fired at the couple outside of their house. This method of overusing the shotgun seems a little disproportionate to the ultimate goal and therefore demonstrates that he was targeted to send a message to his fellow law enforcement officials and by extension the government.

Some might argue that it is the fact that these higher ranking officials are of a certain political stature that their killing has been classified as having been an assassination or assassination attempt, as the analysts who submitted the data only focused on those who are surmised to have more political and social significance for their death to be deemed as *necessary* by insurgents. However, this is not the case as the data includes civilians such as journalists, religious figures, business owners. Moreover, the above example of the assassination of Salikh Shamkhalov and his wife shows that the assassinations of lower level targets have been shown to be considered to be *suitable* by insurgents.

Conclusion

If we compare Chechnya and Dagestan, we can see that resentment and the need for retaliation plays a big part in both regions in terms of the types of targets who are chosen and the frequency of attacks. This need for retaliation is similar in both regions, due to the similarities in their traditions based on strong family (and tribal) values where an offence against one is an offence against all. In terms of the underlying, facilitating factors contributing to the rationale behind the designation of individuals as *suitable targets*, it is clear that in both regions *resentment* against those who are seen as perpetuating violence, economic underdevelopment, corruption and social inequality were targeted. Therefore, in both Chechnya and Dagestan government officials are seen as a more suitable and *valuable* target to assassinate in order to both spread the message of their 'anger' of their 'national situation' as well as spreading fear within local government institutions. However, where they diverge is in regard to those who were the most frequently targeted; government officials in Chechnya and both government officials and law enforcement in Dagestan. In Chechnya the focus was overwhelmingly on targeting government officials, to retaliate against indiscriminate violence

committed against the population and higher-level corruption, mismanagement and betrayal due to the process of Chechnisation. However, in Dagestan government officials, law enforcement and to some extent religious figures were targeted the most. The targeting of police was retaliation against their brutal policy of arresting and torturing anyone who remotely resembled a Salafist, as well as the deeply entrenched corruption within the police force. Whereas religious figures were targeted based on their defiance against violent methods or for not adhering to a stricter Salafist ideology, in the eyes of the insurgent, further perpetuating the degradation of Dagestani society. Moreover, alternative practices, under the label of 'magic', were condemned in both regions however, in Chechnya individuals were condemned and targeted by government and police officials, and in Dagestan they were condemned and killed by insurgents. In Chechnya, the establishment of a more stable, though conceivably more brutal, regional government following the Second Chechen war has established a difficult environment, through a 'climate of fear' for militants to target and conduct assassinations (King & Menon, 2010: 28). On the other hand, the 'rampant corruption' which spread throughout Dagestan has exacerbated economic and social instability within the region, along with perpetuating violent norms in justice, creating an environment which enables the use of assassinations by insurgents to flourish, which explains the general trend in increase in the use of this form of political violence throughout the region. Moreover, the extreme Islamic ideologies of these groups created justification for their actions. Furthermore, these findings verify the need for an element within the routine activities theory that the *instability* of the environment is a major driver and facilitating factor of the frequency of use of assassinations as a terrorist tactic by insurgents.

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Appendix

Table 2. Relationship between target type and the success of an assassination event

Assassination Events								
Target Type	Chechnya				Dagestan			
	Unsuccessful		Successful		Unsuccessful		Successful	
	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Business	1	4.5	1	2.7	0	0	0	0
Government (General)	18	82	21	58.3	17	56.6	24	34.2
Journalists & Media	1	4.5	1	2.7	1	3.3	1	1.42
Military	2	9	0	0	2	6.6	4	5.7
NGO	0	0	2	5.5	0	0	0	0
Police	0	0	5	13.8	4	13.3	25	35.7
Private Citizens & Property	0	0	3	8.3	3	10	9	12.9
Religious Figures / Institutions	0	0	3	8.3	3	10	7	10
Total	22	100	36	100	30	100	70	100

Table 3. Comparison of assassination target sub-types between Chechnya and Dagestan

Target Type		Target Sub-Type	Assassination Events			
			Chechnya		Dagestan	
			Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Business	Bank/Commerce	2	3.5	0	0	
	Government (General)	Government Personnel (excluding police, military)	28	48.3	20	20
		Head of State	5	8.6	3	3
		Intelligence	0	0	2	2
		Judge/Attorney/Court	3	5.2	4	4
		Politician or Political Party Movement/Meeting/Rally	3	5.2	12	12
Journalists & Media	Newspaper Journalist/Staff/Facility	2	3.5	1	1	
	Other (including online news agencies)	0	0	1	1	
	Military	Military Personnel (soldiers, troops, officers, forces)	1	1.7	5	5
Military Transportation/Vehicle (excluding convoys)		1	1.7	0	0	
Paramilitary		0	0	1	1	
NGO	International NGO	2	2.5	0	0	
Police	Police Security Forces/Officers	5	8.6	29	29	
Private Citizens & Property	Laborer (General)/Occupation Identified	1	1.7	0	0	
	Named Civilian	0	0	10	10	
	Race/Ethnicity Identified	1	1.7	0	0	
	Religion Identified	0	0	1	1	
	Unnamed Civilian/Unspecified	1	1.7	1	1	
Religious Figures & Institutions	Affiliated Institution	0	0	1	1	
	Religious Figure	3	5.2	9	9	
Total		58	100	100	100	