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**THESIS**

**THE RADICALIZATION OF THE JAMAAT AL  
MUSLIMEEN, AN ISLAMIC MILITANT GROUP  
IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

by

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December 2021

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**THE RADICALIZATION OF THE JAMAAT AL MUSLIMEEN,  
AN ISLAMIC MILITANT GROUP IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The evolution of the Jamaat al Muslimeen (JAM) into a violent extremist group resulted in a deadly attempted coup d'état attack on the government of Trinidad and Tobago in 1990, claiming the lives of 24 persons and causing injury to many. The attack impacted the entire Caribbean region and the Western Hemisphere. There were fears that similar attacks could be meted out in these regions by disenchanting groups. This thesis investigates the factors that contributed to the JAM's evolution from a social group to a radical group and then to a violent extremist one. It assesses Guyana's risk for such phenomena and makes recommendations on how to avert it. The thesis concludes that a combination of factors, specifically the Indianization of Islam, ethnic polarization, ideology, economic repression, and grievances, contributed to the evolution of the JAM. The praxis of Indianization of Islam was the primary factor that triggered the establishment of the group and effectively planted the seed of radicalization. As the other factors unfolded, they nurtured the radicalization process, which escalated to the deadly attempted coup d'état on 27 July 1990. Sharing a similar identical historical, economic, and sociopolitical background with Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana is potentially susceptible to violent extremism, which necessitates appropriate actions by policymakers and other stakeholders to prevent the emergence of such groups in Guyana and the violence associated with them.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ALCAN	Aluminum Company of Canada
APNU	A Partnership for National Unity
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
COI	Commission of Inquiry
CSME	CARICOM Single Market and Economy
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
ERP	Economic Recovery Program
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMG	Islamic Missionaries Guild
JAM	Jamaat al Muslimeen
JFK	John Fitzgerald Kennedy
NAR	National Alliance for Reconstruction
NBS	National Broadcasting Service
OECD	Organization for European Economic Cooperation
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PNC	People's National Congress
PNM	People's National Movement
PPP	People's Progressive Party
PPP/C	People's Progressive Party/Civic
SB	Special Branch
TT	Trinidad and Tobago
TTPS	Trinidad and Tobago Police Service
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNOCT	United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism
VAT	Value Added Tax
WIF	West Indian Federation

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## I. INTRODUCTION

There have been numerous incidents involving radical groups who have used religious zeal and violent extremism to drive sociopolitical changes. The Jamaat al Muslimeen (JAM), an Islamist group in Trinidad and Tobago (a Caribbean twin-island), was one of those groups. It exploited religious zeal and terror, among several other social and environmental conditions, in its bid to transform the country into an Islamic state. The group's deadly attempted coup d'état on July 27, 1990, led by Bakr, cost the lives of 24 persons,<sup>1</sup> including a member of parliament<sup>2</sup> and several police officers, and injury to many.

During the early 1980s, *jihad al-sayf* (jihad of the sword), a more militant ideology (armed violence in defense of Islam), infiltrated Trinidad and Tobago. The doctrine re-emerged during the Soviet Union's war with Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989.<sup>3</sup> Abdullah Azzam, a militant Muslim scholar from Palestine, was essentially the progenitor for its re-emergence. He became obsessed with the praxis of global jihad as a religious instrument to evict the *infidels* (Russians) from Muslim territories in Afghanistan. This period was the watershed for global jihad as a phenomenon.<sup>4</sup>

The JAM's indoctrination was embedded in *salafism*—a puritanical interpretation of Sunni Islam, which idealizes the practices of the religion's founders.<sup>5</sup> The doctrine diverges from the orthodox interpretations of the Qur'an and the *sunnah* (Prophet Mohammed's traditions).<sup>6</sup> The practice of *salafism* permeated the *ummah* (Muslim community) in Trinidad and Tobago through the travel of Trinidadian Islamic scholars to

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<sup>1</sup> Sir David Sommons et al., "Report of the Commission of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into the Events Surrounding the Attempted Coup D'état of 27th July 1990," 2014, 975.

<sup>2</sup> Sommons et al., 344.

<sup>3</sup> Glenn E. Robinson, *Global Jihad: A Brief History* (California: Stanford University Press, 2020), 44.

<sup>4</sup> Robinson, 44.

<sup>5</sup> Shahram Akbarzadeh, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Political Islam*, Second edition (New York: Routledge, 2021), 261.

<sup>6</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 17.

Saudi Arabia during the early 1980s.<sup>7</sup> The adherents of this interpretation likened Trinidad and Tobago to “Sodom and Gomorrah”<sup>8</sup>—Quranic and Biblical twin cities that transgressed against God’s will. Kathleen Collihan and Constantine Danopoulos have asserted that “for Bakr, the nation was corrupt and was in the hands of evil men; his mission was to chart a new national direction inspired by the will of Allah.”<sup>9</sup>

## **A. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

What explains the escalation of the ideological radicalization of the JAM, which led to the deadly coup d’état? Furthermore, what can other Caribbean states and Guyana specifically do to prevent the emergence of such phenomena?

The research unpacks the radicalization of the JAM, synthesizes the conditions attributed to the escalation of violence, and extracts lessons for Guyana. Even though South American by geography, Guyana shares similar demography and sociopolitical and economic cultures with Trinidad and Tobago.

In response to the research question, the thesis examines the history of the *ummah* in Trinidad and Tobago. It identifies the point at which the JAM became a splinter group. From that point, the thesis ties the environmental factors to the increasing of radicalization of the JAM to the juncture where they carried out the violent attack.

## **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

The JAM’s radicalization and its deadly violence directed at the government impacted the entire Caribbean region and the Western hemisphere. The group’s escalation of violence and the likelihood of its spread to other Caribbean territories immediately became a security concern for governments and policymakers. The incident was a black swan and stochastic event for the Caribbean region, which usually enjoys a peaceful and

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<sup>7</sup> John McCoy and W. Andy Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 4 (April 3, 2017): 272, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1206734>.

<sup>8</sup> Kathleen Collihan and Constantine Danopoulos, “Coup d’État Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure,” *Sage* 19, no. 3 (1993): 441, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X9301900308>.

<sup>9</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, 441.

genial atmosphere. Although the attempted coup d'état took place three decades ago, several researchers continue to examine it to address several puzzles.

Quite a few pieces of literature have examined an individual factor, for example, oil, crimes, drugs, ethnic polarization or system of government, and so on to show how that particular factor provoked the radicalization and violent extremism of the JAM. This approach of attributing the JAM's turn to extremism to one factor departs from the position of most radicalization specialists. Therefore, the significance of this research is to determine the combination of factors that triggered the JAM's escalation of violence and to add to the reservoir of scholarships, which policymakers and other researchers can explore.

### **C. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review seeks to expand the researcher's understanding of factors and conditions that pervaded Trinidad and Tobago from the period of the indentured laborers' arrival from India to work on the plantation to the violent attack by the JAM. It then establishes a nexus between these factors and the violent extremism of the JAM. This literature review also assists in addressing the research question by providing some theoretical knowledge on the conceptualization of Islamist radicalization and investigate why some individuals join radical groups. Finally, it examines Guyana and its connection to Islamist radicalism.

#### **1. Immiscibility within the Ummah**

Marginalization of the black Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago was rooted in the "Indian Islam" mindset, wherein some mainstream Muslims felt that the Indians and Arabs were the true Muslims. Daurius Figueira, in *Jihad in Trinidad and Tobago, July 27, 1990*, posits that "to be Muslim in Trinidad is therefore to be an Indian and Afro-Muslims [(Muslims of African descent)] to be Muslims must be constituted 'honorary Indians,' a

discourse of black-on-black racism decisively orientalist in reverse.”<sup>10</sup> It was difficult for Afro-Trinidadians (descendants of the slaves) to assimilate into the mainstream *ummah*.

The immiscibility of the Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians (descendants of the indentured servants from South Asia) within the *ummah* became more apparent by the abhorrence of interracial marriages and the practice of endogamy to maintain the racial identity of the Indian Muslims.<sup>11</sup> Figueira further states that “under this practice of selective inbreeding, the Islamic worldview mutated, degenerated to that of an ethnicized, particularized, racist worldview.”<sup>12</sup> The perception of Indian Islam effectively sowed the seed for the JAM’s emergence and radicalization. The mainstream’s alienation provoked disenchantment among the Afro-Muslim community, making them predisposed to radicalization. Disenchantment makes the ground fertile and conducive for radicalization.<sup>13</sup>

The mainstream Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago played down the origin of the religion, which purportedly started with the arrival of slaves and gave more credence to its linkage to the Indians. John McCoy and W. Andy Knight in *Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends* posit that oral history suggests that West African slaves introduced Islam to Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>14</sup> However, they indicate that “the majority of Muslims in [Trinidad and Tobago] trace their lineage to Indians who came from Mogul states Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in Northern India...primarily as indentured servants.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Daurius Figueira, *Jihad in Trinidad and Tobago, July 27, 1990* (Nebraska: Writers Club Press, 2002), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Figueira, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Figueira, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 11 (November 2, 2015): 963, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1051375>.

<sup>14</sup> McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends,” 271.

<sup>15</sup> McCoy and Knight, 271.

The late 20th century saw steady conversion to Islam in Trinidad and Tobago by adherents from other religious groups, particularly Afro-Trinidadians. Their obsession with the religion was driven by the political energies of the social movement group—the Black Power movement.<sup>16</sup> McCoy and Knight assert that the Afro-Trinidadians were referred to as “reverts,” a term which denotes that Black people first practiced Islam in Trinidad and Tobago and that they were now going back to the religion,<sup>17</sup> which their forefathers practiced before being forcibly brought to the Caribbean from West Africa.

The alienation continued at the level of governance, specifically in the form of the Anjuman Sunnat ul Jamaat Association (ASJ), which the government recognized as the official governing body of the *ummah* in Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>18</sup> This organization controlled a majority of the mosques and received subsidies from the government. However, it was more aligned with the dominant Indo-Muslim (Muslims of Indian descent) community and had been accused of being unfair towards the Afro-Muslim community.<sup>19</sup> The ASJ, with its partisan leadership, exacerbated the fragile relationship between the Afro and Indo-Muslims.

Both sets of authors explicitly indicate a deliberate ploy within the *ummah* to distinguish between Afro and Indo-Muslims. Figueira suggests that it was over the ethnic identity of the “real Muslims.” McCoy and Knight, too, highlight the prejudice against the Afro-Muslims by the governing body. There is adequate evidence, therefore, of immiscibility between the two major ethnic groups that pervaded within the *ummah* gave rise to the pursuit of a sense of identity among the Afro-Muslims.

## **2. Social Factors**

Apart from the immiscibility within the *ummah*, the emergence and evolution of the JAM were partly on account of existing social factors. Chris Zambelis recounts that the “JAM emerged in the early 1980s during a period of severe social and economic crises and

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<sup>16</sup> McCoy and Knight, 272.

<sup>17</sup> McCoy and Knight, 272.

<sup>18</sup> McCoy and Knight, 272.

<sup>19</sup> McCoy and Knight, 272.

heightened racial and ethnic tensions between Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians, the multiethnic country's two dominant communities.”<sup>20</sup> He advances the argument that the JAM evolved out of social and economic dislocations.<sup>21</sup> His view is echoed in a 2018 policy report from the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OECD) which records that “[corruption] wastes public resources, widens economic and social inequalities, breeds discontent and political [polarization], and reduces trust in institutions.”<sup>22</sup>

Evan Ellis, in *Gangs, Guns, Drugs, and Islamic Foreign Fighters: Security Challenges in Trinidad and Tobago*, links the JAM's evolution to greed and crime and provides the United States policymakers with a framework on how better to conceptualize the security challenges of Trinidad and Tobago. He concludes with recommendations for the commitment of more attention and resources from the United States to address those challenges. He posits that “the principal symptoms of the malaise affecting the country are gangs, guns, and drugs,”<sup>23</sup> and that the endemic corruption within the country allowed the “cancer” to spread.<sup>24</sup> Ellis attributes the rise of the Jamaat al Muslimeen to its interaction with disadvantaged and marginalized black youths. He emphasizes that “Trinidad and Tobago's original Muslim population were of East Indian descent and lived fairly harmoniously with other parts of the population. The [JAM] by contrast, had its origins in the marginalized Afro-Trinidadian youths of slums such as Laventille”<sup>25</sup>—one of the country's major crime hotspots.

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<sup>20</sup> Chris Zambelis, “Jamaat Al-Muslimeen: The Growth and Decline of Islamist Militancy in Trinidad and Tobago,” The Jamestown Foundation Global Research & Analysis, 2009, <https://jamestown.org/program/jamaat-al-muslimeen-the-growth-and-decline-of-islamist-militancy-in-trinidad-and-tobago/>.

<sup>21</sup> Zambelis.

<sup>22</sup> *Competitiveness in South East Europe: A Policy Outlook 2018*, Competitiveness and Private Sector Development (OECD, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264298576-en>.

<sup>23</sup> Evan Ellis, “Global Americans,” *Gangs, Guns, Drugs and Islamic Foreign Fighters: Security Challenges in Trinidad and Tobago* (blog), September 8, 2017, <https://theglobalamericans.org/2017/09/gangs-guns-drugs-islamic-foreign-fighters-security-challenges-trinidad-tobago/>.

<sup>24</sup> Ellis.

<sup>25</sup> Ellis.

While Ellis did not link the socioeconomic dislocations in Trinidad and Tobago to crimes, gangs, and drugs directly, he was careful to point out that the situation in the country should be put in context with those factors in mind. Crimes and corruption are causal factors for several social ills. While no literature establishes a causal relation between crimes and radicalization, Ellis argues that the Islamic situation in the country needed to be understood in the context of gangs, from which a sense of purpose was given to the country's alienated youths.<sup>26</sup> Tord Skovly Freberg in "How Corruption Affects Vulnerability to Radicalization into Violent Extremism: Examining the Case of Kosovo's Foreign Fighters" examines how corruption could provoke radicalization. He posits that corruption can create an environment in which people become pulled into the dynamics and narratives of violent extremist groups.<sup>27</sup>

Social movement theory is embedded in social and environmental dislocations and discontent. Environmental conditions can influence people's feelings and lead them to join social movement groups,<sup>28</sup> which provide a space of consolation for the disenchanting. Freberg's theory adds to the explanation of the emergence of the JAM, who were discontented with being outcasts within the *ummah* and became natural recruits for the social movement at the time.

Cynthia Mahabir, in "Allah's Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago," asserts that the radicalization could have been premised on identity politics, which emerged in the 1960s, and "refers to the demand by members of a group for cultural recognition of their collective identity."<sup>29</sup> Mary Bernstein concurs that although identity politics is embedded in social movements, its understanding has competing theoretical

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<sup>26</sup> Ellis.

<sup>27</sup> Tord S. Freberg, "How Corruption Affects Vulnerability to Radicalization into Violent Extremism" (Master's Thesis, The Arctic University of Norway, 2018), <https://libguides.nps.edu/citation/chicago-nb-zotero/#s-lg-box-wrapper-29165980>.

<sup>28</sup> Freberg.

<sup>29</sup> Cynthia Mahabir, "Allah's Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago," *The British Journal of Criminology* 53, no. 1 (2013): 64, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23639968>.

approaches, including “experience, culture, identity, politics, and power.”<sup>30</sup> She further posits that “scholars see identity groups as advocating for recognition of and respect for their cultural differences.”<sup>31</sup> However, Cressida Heyes in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* departs from Bernstein’s view of identity group as advocates of respect and tolerance for cultural differences. She defines identity politics as “a political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups.”<sup>32</sup> She further asserts that “one’s identity as a woman or as African American, for example, makes one peculiarly vulnerable to cultural imperialism (including stereotyping, erasure, or appropriation of one’s group identity), violence, exploitation, marginalization, or powerlessness.”<sup>33</sup>

A common denominator in these observations is the push for acceptance and recognition of change that result from a fractured social construct. While Bernstein links political identity to cultural difference, Heyes spares no effort or thought to connect it with oppression and marginalization, which could provoke grievances. These theories correspond with the factors that provoked the emergence of the JAM.

### 3. Economic Factors

Several scholars have viewed economic failures as the most critical factor to bring about violent extremism and linked export-concentrated economies with violence. These economies create conditions for dependence, social fragmentation, and political instability, all of which characterize revolutions.<sup>34</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, in *Coup d’état Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure*, posit that “specialization in exports causes dependence, and inexorably links a country’s economy to the ups and downs of

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<sup>30</sup> Mary Bernstein, “Identity Politics,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, no. 31 (February 2005): 47, <https://doi.org/doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.29.010202.100054>.

<sup>31</sup> Bernstein, 50.

<sup>32</sup> Cressida Heyes, “Identity Politics,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/>.

<sup>33</sup> Heyes.

<sup>34</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, “Coup d’État Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure,” 436.



international demands and price fluctuations.”<sup>35</sup> Consequently, a fall in the price of a major export commodity could result in economic and social dislocations that could render the government incapable of exercising control.

Collihan and Danopoulos buttressed their argument on O’Kane’s proposition that countries with heavily export-based economies were predisposed to coups d’états. They posit that “export conditions...affect the level of economic and political stability and set the stage upon which the conspirators play their part. The more dominant these conditions are, the more probable it will be that a coup will happen.”<sup>36</sup> Declining revenues could increase unemployment, inhibit the government from ensuring the equitable distribution of public goods and social services, and force government to implement austere measures to cushion the effects of the disruption caused by the exporting activities. All of these could ignite dissatisfaction and protest actions in the country.

Michael Ross posits that oil wealth, in particular, often creates economic and political instability and aggravates ethnic grievances.<sup>37</sup> An economy that is heavily reliant on oil exportation is likely to be affected by cycles of economic growth and decline (booms and busts). The latter leads to frustration with the government, and the more disadvantaged could be quickly recruited into radical or insurgent groups.<sup>38</sup> During the early 1960s, Trinidad and Tobago’s economy struggled due to declining demand for significant exports. Unemployment increased, and the standard of living deteriorated to abysmal levels,<sup>39</sup> which consequently led to industrial disputes and unrest. Collihan and Danopoulos postulate that “declining revenues, due to lessening the demand for cocoa, sugar and citrus fruits, caused unemployment to increase to over 10%. Strikes and disputes rose drastically from 75 incidents involving 15,900 workers in 1962 to 92 disputes in 1963 encompassing 25,800 workers.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, 436.

<sup>36</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, 436.

<sup>37</sup> Michael L. Ross, “Blood Barrels: Why Oil Wealth Fuels Conflicts,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 2008, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Ross, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, “Coup d’État Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure,” 440.

<sup>40</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, 438.

The increase in oil prices in the early 1970s transformed the country into one of the leading economies in the Caribbean with a per capita income of US\$6,000. Collihan and Danopoulos state that “the rapid accretion of oil revenues created a brief span of material prosperity, sufficiently intense to raise the expectation of the general population.”<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, with the 1983 world recession, government revenues from oil declined from 4.3 billion Trinidad and Tobago dollars in 1981 to 1.6 billion by 1988.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, even though the construction and agricultural sectors continued to grow economically until 1989, unemployment remained a challenge.<sup>43</sup> The government essentially became overwhelmed by the economic downturn, manifesting in its inability to adequately provide public goods and services to all its citizens, rendering the society predisposed for social fallouts.

Economic decline due to the disruption of exporting activities is a common phenomenon in most countries. The reaction of industrial action to economic decline is almost common, but seldom degenerates into economic marginalization and violent unrest. Contrary to Collihan and Danopoulos’s argument that financial problems due to the decline in exports will always be succeeded by a revolution, Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins posit that economic marginalization forms a landscape for radicalization.<sup>44</sup> They contend that “Piazza’s statistical analysis of 172 countries between 1970 and 2006, yielding over 3,000 observations, finds robust empirical support for a link between minority groups’ experience with economic discrimination and higher rates of domestic terrorism.”<sup>45</sup>

The analysis of the literature uncovers a positive relationship between export dependency and political stability. Although there exists some the correlation between oil export and the coup d’état, the Trinidad and Tobago experience entailed other intervening

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<sup>41</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, 439.

<sup>42</sup> Boodhoo, Ken I., “Islamic Fundamentalism in the Caribbean (Dialogue #135),” *LACC Occasional Papers Series. Dialogues (1980 - 1994)* 34, no. #135 (February 1992): 4, <http://rightsstatements.org/vocab/InC/1.0/>.

<sup>43</sup> Boodhoo, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” 962.

<sup>45</sup> Hafez and Mullins, 962.

variables. I accept that economic repression can stimulate a violent revolution; however, it is difficult to ascertain that it was the single most important factor that predicated the attempted coup by the JAM. Trinidad and Tobago was not the only oil-exporting country affected by the drop in oil prices during the early 1980s and resulted in the global recession. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) *Oil and Gas 360 Journal* records that “in the early 1980s, oil prices began to decline, prompting OPEC to cut production to bolster the value of its lifeblood.”<sup>46</sup>

#### 4. Ideology

Ideology, according to Hafez and Mullins, refers to an idealistic worldview that is rooted in transcendental philosophies and is conflated with radicalism.<sup>47</sup> They also claim that “ideology can help forge a new rebellious identity by appealing to symbols, narratives, mythologies, and rituals that give meaning to acts of personal risk and sacrifice.”<sup>48</sup> This belief system forms the foundation upon which a radical group is formed and motivated. Central to radicalization examined in this study is the construction is the interpretation of the Qur’an, which lends itself to a diversity of interpretations to fit a status quo.<sup>49</sup>

The Iranian Revolution of 1979, which saw the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, played a role in the JAM’s adoption of a radical ideology.<sup>50</sup> This revolution was the watershed event for the extreme wave of Islamism and resonated with young black Trinidadian males’ personal and sociopolitical ambitions as a new identity. Drawing from established Islamist ideology at the time, the JAM viewed their surrounding society of Trinidad and Tobago as secular and paganistic, akin to the period of *jahiliya*, a period of ignorance that plagued Arabian society before the advent of Islam.

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<sup>46</sup> “Oil: The 30-Year Anniversary of the 1986 Collapse,” *Oil and Gas 360*, 2016, <https://www.oilandgas360.com/oil-the-30-year-anniversary-of-the-1986-collapse/>.

<sup>47</sup> Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” 966.

<sup>48</sup> Hafez and Mullins, 967.

<sup>49</sup> Mohammed Hafez, “Takfir and Violence against Muslims,” in *Fault Lines in Global Jihad*, ed. A Moghadam and B Fishman (London: Routledge, 2011), 42.

<sup>50</sup> Robinson, *Global Jihad: A Brief History*, 44.

Hafez notes in “Takfir and Violence against Muslims” that “extremists conveniently shift their method of jurisprudence to justify tactics that would normally be rejected by their strict constructivist reading of the religious texts and have reverted to an interpretive method that contravenes their literalist predispositions.”<sup>51</sup> The scriptures in the Qur’an lend themselves to a diversity of interpretations to fit the objectives of radical leaders—which is generally aimed at upending the status quo in society.

Quintan Wiktorowicz, in *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, posits that “education is a central concern since Muslims can only fulfill their duties to God if they fully understand Islam.”<sup>52</sup> The transmission of the ideology is facilitated by the requirement as a Muslim to learn the will of God. Radical adherents devote much of their time and energy to religious learning, which allows them to know God’s will and facilitates the spreading of the message to others.<sup>53</sup>

## 5. Conceptualizing Radicalization

According to Hafez and Mullins “radicalization involves adopting an extremist worldview, one that is rejected by mainstream society and one that deems legitimate the use of violence as a method to effect societal or political change.”<sup>54</sup> William R. Patterson in “Islamic Radicalization in Kenya” underscores several factors that intensify the country’s vulnerability to violent extremism: “structural and institutional factors, economy, weak governance, geography, grievances, foreign and military policy, and jihadist ideology.”<sup>55</sup> Vinayak Dalmia in *Islamic Radicalization in Belgium* indicates that Muslims came from North Africa, Turkey, and Morocco to Belgium in the 1960s to bolster the labor force. He argues that their effort to assimilate into the society was stymied with catchphrases like “Turkish rats, roll your mats” being repeated at political rallies in the

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<sup>51</sup> Hafez, “Takfir and Violence against Muslims,” 42.

<sup>52</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, 17.

<sup>53</sup> Wiktorowicz, 17.

<sup>54</sup> Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” 960.

<sup>55</sup> William R. Patterson, “Islamic Radicalization in Kenya,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 78, 3Q 2015, 19.

1990s, a decade before the 9/11 attacks.<sup>56</sup> These slogans, coupled with the growing tension between Islamic and Western values, have led to the steady radicalization of Muslims, which led to several extremist attacks in Belgium, including the Brussels airport/train station attack in March 2016 that claimed the lives of more than two dozen persons.<sup>57</sup> In “Grievances, Governance, and Islamist Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa,” Caitriona Dowd identifies political marginalization and grievances to explain why some factors contribute to violent Islamist ideologies in some countries but not in others.<sup>58</sup> Hafez and Mullins, however, argue that “radicalization specialists often point out the following mixture of factors that come together to produce extremism: grievances, networks, ideologies, and enabling environments and support structures.”<sup>59</sup>

Hafez and Mullins are careful to distinguish between radicalization and violent extremism. A radical group may not necessarily evolve into an extreme violent one. Radicalization is, however, a risk factor associated with extreme violence. Freberg also notes that “not all radicals need to be violent, and radical ideas that do not condone the exercise of violence could be seen as acceptable if the individuals or groups are acting within the boundaries of the law.”<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, Hafez and Mullins define radicalization as “the process by which individuals (or groups) change their beliefs, adopt an extremist viewpoint, and advocate (or practice) violence to achieve their goals.”<sup>61</sup> Freberg defines violent extremism as “the beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically motivated violence to carry out radical ideological, religious, or political

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<sup>56</sup> Vinayak Dalmia, “Islamic Radicalization in Belgium,” *The U.S. Air Force Journal of European, Middle Eastern, and African Affairs (JEMEAA)* 2, no. 3 (2020): 6, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JEMEAA/Display/Article/2329478/islamic-radicalization-in-belgium/>.

<sup>57</sup> Dalmia.

<sup>58</sup> Caitriona Dowd, “Grievances, Governance and Islamist Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 53, no. 4 (2015): 506, JSTOR.

<sup>59</sup> Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” 961.

<sup>60</sup> Freberg, “Corruption and Violent Extremism.”

<sup>61</sup> Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” 960.

views.”<sup>62</sup> Extremists’ views can be predicated by many issues, which are resistant to the general worldview, societal norms, and religious community.<sup>63</sup>

Tinka Veldhuis and Jorgen Staun in *Islamist Radicalization: A Root Cause Model* postulate that “the awareness that radicalization among Muslims in the Western world cannot be attributed to independent, straightforward causes like mental derangement, religious fanaticism, or poverty has turned scientific attention to alternative, more complex explanations of radicalization.”<sup>64</sup> Hafez and Mullins point out that “radicalization specialists often point out the following mixture of factors that come together to produce extremism: grievances, networks, ideologies, and enabling environments and support structures.”<sup>65</sup> No study has yet empirically synthesized these factors and associated them with the radicalization of the JAM to investigate whether the sequencing or unfolding of these factors was definitive cause for the JAM’s gradual radicalization and escalating violence, which inexorably led to the deadly attempted coup d’état. The social, political, and economic conditions in Trinidad and Tobago must be examined along with its history of radicalization to determine the primary cause of the radicalization process.

In unpacking the various conceptualizations of radicalization, one finds a common denominator in much of the literature: grievance, although not all Islamist violence may be grievance-based. Hafez and Mullins posit that there has been scholarly agreement on a complex approach to radicalization—one that opposes “sequential process, steps, stages or phases.”<sup>66</sup> The factors or circumstances that underpin the escalation of violence in one group may not be the same for another. Wiktorowicz supports this position by adding that it is unclear why some “aggrieved individuals” become radicalized while others do not.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Freberg, “Corruption and Violent Extremism,” 17.

<sup>63</sup> Freberg, 17.

<sup>64</sup> Tinka Veldhuis and Jørgen Staun, *Islamist Radicalization: A Root Cause Model*, ed. Peter Morris (Netherlands: The Hague, Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2009), 13.

<sup>65</sup> Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” 961.

<sup>66</sup> Hafez and Mullins, 960.

<sup>67</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, 12.

Therefore, it stands to reason that grievances alone do not drive radical behavior; instead, it is more likely that a combination of factors does.

## 6. Theory about Joining Radical Groups

The universal process of joining a social group or movement seldom mirrors the process of joining a radical group. While a brochure or pamphlet may be sufficient to spark participation for some social movements, a radical or riskier group may require more effort to recruit new members. Quintan Wiktorowicz used the al-Muhajiroun—a radical fringe Islamic movement based in the United Kingdom—to explain how individuals are pulled into radical groups and how they are persuaded to get involved in high-risk activism.<sup>68</sup>

Several students of social movements refer to three distinct factors that facilitate participation in radical activism. These factors are merely part of a more generic process to facilitate recruitment.<sup>69</sup> The first is the material incentive to attract participants. Although this factor is a causal mechanism, several nonmaterial incentives motivate participation.<sup>70</sup> The second factor, the social network, is critical and provides a pathway to recruitment, especially in a high-risk social movement.<sup>71</sup> Yet, the social network is only made good by the individual's strongly held belief system.<sup>72</sup> Third, the frame provides a representation of a cognitive structure that links the individual to the group. Hence, a misalignment between the frame and the orientation of the group could inhibit the individual's participation.<sup>73</sup>

Wiktorowicz contends that while these factors could impact recruitment, they do not adequately explain participation in radical Islamic activism.<sup>74</sup> He also contends that

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<sup>68</sup> Wiktorowicz, 17.

<sup>69</sup> Wiktorowicz, 17.

<sup>70</sup> Wiktorowicz, 15.

<sup>71</sup> Wiktorowicz, 15.

<sup>72</sup> Wiktorowicz, 15.

<sup>73</sup> Wiktorowicz, 16.

<sup>74</sup> Wiktorowicz, 16.

there is a process that draws potential participants toward Islamist movement,<sup>75</sup> and advances three factors to address the puzzle. First, persons are driven by “cognitive opening”<sup>76</sup> that shapes sureness in opinions that were previously accepted. The cognitive opening could be prompted by activism outreach efforts, alienation, discrimination, socioeconomic crisis, political repression, etc.<sup>77</sup> The second is the legitimacy of the group. Wiktorowicz points out that if a group is not seen as legitimate, the recruit’s interest will wane and given the pluralistic interpretation of the Qur’an, groups must convince individuals that their interpretation is more authentic than others.<sup>78</sup> Third is the education drive to shift individuals’ motivation from self-interest to transcendental rewards. The ideology is offered as a strategy for conforming to God’s will and guaranteeing salvation.<sup>79</sup>

## 7. Guyana and Islamic Radicalism

The literature is scant on Guyana and Islamic radicalization. Nonetheless, there has been one instance where two Guyanese, after a nine-week trial, were convicted by a United States federal jury for their plot to explode fuel tanks at the JFK Airport in an effort to mirror the 9/11 terror attacks. Russell Defreitas, who was born in Guyana but became a naturalized citizen of the United States, and his accomplice, Abdul Kadir, a former member of Guyana’s national assembly, were both sentenced in 2010. They were also accused of having linkages with extremist Muslim groups and operatives in the Caribbean.<sup>80</sup> Apart from this incident, there has not been any reported incident of Guyanese and Islamic radicalization or extremism. Zambelis points out that “it is important to note that there is no substantive evidence to date pointing to a nascent radical threat in Guyana.”<sup>81</sup> Despite

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<sup>75</sup> Wiktorowicz, 14.

<sup>76</sup> Wiktorowicz, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Wiktorowicz, 5.

<sup>78</sup> Wiktorowicz, 6.

<sup>79</sup> Wiktorowicz, 6.

<sup>80</sup> “Life Sentence for Russell Defreitas in JFK Bomb Plot,” *BBC News*, February 17, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-12499345>.

<sup>81</sup> Chris Zambelis, “The Threat of Religious Radicalism in Guyana,” *The Jamestown Foundation Global Research & Analysis*, 2006, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-threat-of-religious-radicalism-in-guyana/>.



the absence of hard evidence of radical extremism being practiced in Guyana, its emergence is likely through the world wide web and free movement of people in the region.

Islam in Guyana has its roots in the arrival of African slaves to work on the colonial plantations in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was officially restored in the country with the arrival of South Asians in the year 1838,<sup>82</sup> purportedly to fill the void created by the abolition of the slavery system. It has been recorded that the Mandingo and Fulani Muslims reportedly were among the first from West Africa to set foot on Guyana's sugar plantations.<sup>83</sup> An uprising against the Dutch plantation owners erupted in 1763 and ended under the terms and conditions for peace were written by Cuffy, a slave, who led the rebellion. The content of the document was reportedly written in Arabic, which would indicate that Cuffy might have been a Muslim.<sup>84</sup>

Both Trinidad and Guyana share similar histories related to the emergence of Islam. They also have similar demographics, which are consistently dominated by peoples of African and East Indian descent. Smaller ethnic groups such as Europeans, Chinese, and mixed races are the minority. Guyana, a South American country in terms of geography, still has a surviving Amerindian population, which also influenced the culture. In contrast, Trinidad's population is a bit more cosmopolitan and has a broader demographic.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Guyanese Muslims began a movement to drum out sectarian practices and enable greater unification and oneness of the religion.<sup>85</sup> Raymond Chickrie in "Muslims in Guyana" indicates that "the establishment of Muslim colleges to train imams and the generosity of Muslim governments to provide scholarships for young Guyanese Muslims have been helping to produce a uniform orthodox practice."<sup>86</sup> To this end, the homogenization process reinstated the Arabian influence to the religion. Chickrie

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<sup>82</sup> Raymond Chickrie, "Muslims in Guyana: History, Traditions, Conflict and Change," Muslims in Guyana, 1999, [http://www.guyana.org/features/guyanese\\_muslim.html](http://www.guyana.org/features/guyanese_muslim.html).

<sup>83</sup> Chickrie.

<sup>84</sup> Chickrie.

<sup>85</sup> Chickrie.

<sup>86</sup> Chickrie.

posits that “Arabic and Arab-ness, it would seem today in Guyana, legitimizes Islam, and South Asian ‘cultural Islam’ is now viewed as un-Islamic and polluted with innovations.”<sup>87</sup>

Global jihadism, a recent and current phenomenon with its call for the creation of Islamic Caliphates through the use of force in Muslim lands and in a territory where *jahiliya* exists, is applicable to any territory with a Muslim population. Even though it is a view that is accepted by the mainstream *ummah*, it could be seen as attractive to splinter elements, with justification from the Qur’an. Although Islamism is generally known for its heterogeneous following, differing interpretations of the Qur’an can be used to substantiate ideological positions that form the foundation of the various sects.

#### **D. HYPOTHESIS OF THE RESEARCH**

The hypothesis for this research is that no single factor was a definitive cause for the extreme radicalization of the JAM. The “Indianization” of Islam was effectively the starting point of identity politics within the *ummah*. This phenomenon, coupled with the effects of the economic repression that, which seemed to affect mostly the black underclass, fueled the Black Power Movement, which evolved into the JAM. This group was able to secure and bolster the identity of the black underclass and provide a foundation upon which radicalization could fester along with the impact of other environmental factors.

#### **E. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This research is designed to unpack the radicalization of the Jamaat al Muslimeen in Trinidad and Tobago, which led to the deadly attempted coup d’état that killed 24 persons and caused injuries to many. Furthermore, it uncovers the lessons Guyana, which shares almost identical demography and sociopolitical and economic conditions with Trinidad and Tobago, can learn from the Caribbean country. More particularly, the research synthesizes the social, economic, and political factors corresponding to the gradual radicalization of the JAM and its escalating violence.

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<sup>87</sup> Chickrie.

The research encapsulates theoretical analyses of factors to link them to the JAM's emergence and its evolution to radicalization and violent extremism. In order to associate the factors with the radicalization process, I examined the history of the *ummah* in Trinidad and Tobago to determine the circumstances leading to and the juncture at which the JAM was established and their correspondence with the environmental factors. Seminal and scholarly articles were used to extract the facts. Once that starting point was established, the radicalization of the JAM was examined in tandem with the unfolding factors up to the day the attempted coup was carried out. The research incorporates the historical background of the two countries—Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana. Theoretical information related to the study, background, and evolution of the JAM were also examined and analyzed.

## **F. THESIS OVERVIEW**

The thesis comprises five chapters. Chapter I covers the introduction and the literature review of the key aspects of the thesis: the factors, contributing to and the conceptualization of the radicalization process. Chapter II gives an overview of Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana with a focus on Guyana's susceptibility to radical Islam. Chapter III examines the historical evolution of the JAM. Chapter IV gives the analyses and shows how the factors dovetailed with the radicalization of the JAM. Chapter V contains recommendations that policymakers in Guyana could adopt, and the conclusion of the research.

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## II. BACKGROUND

The backgrounds of Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana provide a frame for understanding some factors that help to shape the environment for radicalization and extreme violence. Both countries share almost identical historical backgrounds and sociopolitical and economic trends. This chapter examines the historical, political, economic, and demographic overviews of both countries, as well as Guyana's susceptibility to violent extremism.

### A. BACKGROUND ON TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is a twin-island state on the southernmost point of the Caribbean archipelago, approximately 196 miles from the northwestern tip of Guyana, as seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Map of Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>88</sup>Focus2move, "Map of Trinidad and Tobago - Google Search," May 25, 2021.

The two islands were politically co-joined as a British colony in 1888, with over 50 percent of the total population concentrated in the urban region.<sup>89</sup> Its history makes it one of the most “ethnically diverse countries in the region, with populations of African, Indian, Lebanese, Chinese, and European descent.”<sup>90</sup>

The island of Trinidad itself is the center for most financial, business, and government institutions, including the parliament building. It accounts for about 90 percent of the landmass and approximately 95 percent of the total population of 1.4 million,<sup>91</sup> of which 6 percent are Muslims.

## 1. Historical Overview

Being a former colony of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Trinidad and Tobago was one of the destinations for slaves brought from Africa during the early 16<sup>th</sup> century to plant cocoa, cotton, and coffee. The National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago details that “in 1606, four hundred and seventy enslaved Africans were brought to Trinidad by Dutch slaver, Isaac Duverne. This was the first recorded instance of enslaved Africans being brought to the island.”<sup>92</sup> Between then and the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the country changed hands from the Dutch to the Spanish, then to the British through conquests. By 1797, the British had established sugar plantation systems as sugar had become a valuable commodity that transformed the world economy.<sup>93</sup> As a consequence, the British colonizers brought more slaves to Trinidad and Tobago to meet the world’s demand for

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<sup>89</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Details - Trinidad and Tobago,” CIA World Factbook, accessed May 24, 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/trinidad-and-tobago/map>.

<sup>90</sup> Ellis, “Gangs, Guns, Drugs and Islamic Foreign Fighters.”

<sup>91</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “Gender and Rights Database,” Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, accessed November 6, 2021, [https://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/country-profiles/countries-list/general-introduction/en/?country\\_iso3=TTO](https://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/country-profiles/countries-list/general-introduction/en/?country_iso3=TTO).

<sup>92</sup> National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, “Our African Legacy: Roots and Routes,” National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, accessed October 26, 2021, [https://www.natt.gov.tt/sites/default/files/pdfs/Our\\_African\\_Legacy\\_Roots\\_and\\_Routes.pdf](https://www.natt.gov.tt/sites/default/files/pdfs/Our_African_Legacy_Roots_and_Routes.pdf).

<sup>93</sup> Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2010), 19.

sugar.<sup>94</sup> After the abolition of slavery in 1833, indentured laborers from India were brought in to the islands between 1845 and 1917 to fill the labor shortage on the plantations.

The country acquired its independence from Great Britain in 1962 and became a republic within the British Commonwealth after fourteen years of being an independent state.<sup>95</sup> The road to independence grew out of Great Britain granting the natives of Trinidad and Tobago the right to vote in 1924. This development culminated in the numerous calls for regional representation in the colonial governance, which led to the colonial power granting voting rights to Trinidad and Tobago in 1945.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, the disagreement between the two major ethnic groups (Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians) on whether the nation should pursue membership in the West Indian Federation (WIF) hastened the call for independence. The federation was established under the British Caribbean Federation Act of 1956 to foster a political union among its members. This idea of being a member of the WIF was opposed by prominent Indo-Trinidadians, who felt that the Indo-Trinidadians' interests would be affected. Their minority status would be diluted in a federation whose other member states were predominantly of African descent. Although the Indo-Indians' insecurity did not mushroom into open ethnic strife, their suspicions abounded.<sup>97</sup>

## 2. Political Background

Universal adult suffrage led the People's National Movement (PNM), headed by Dr. Eric Williams, to a majority victory in the first elections in 1956. This party ruled for thirty years before being voted out of office en masse by the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR), a coalition party, in 1986. This election has been one of the most significant in Trinidad and Tobago's political history—the NAR party registered a

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<sup>94</sup> National Library and Information System Authority, "Slavery and Emancipation in Trinidad and Tobago," Programmed for Results: Caribbean Communications Network, 2017, [file:///C:/Users/SO1G3/Zotero/storage/RAKSPCPK/article\\_3730253c-76d7-11e7-9f57-7f58f32268aa.html](file:///C:/Users/SO1G3/Zotero/storage/RAKSPCPK/article_3730253c-76d7-11e7-9f57-7f58f32268aa.html).

<sup>95</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Countries of the World: Guyana 2020," CIA World Factbook, 2020, <https://theodora.com/wfbcurrent/guyana/index.html>.

<sup>96</sup> Caribbean Elections, "Independence in Trinidad and Tobago," Caribbean Elections, 2019, [http://caribbeanelections.com/education/independence/tt\\_independence.asp](http://caribbeanelections.com/education/independence/tt_independence.asp).

<sup>97</sup> Daurius Figueira, *The East Indian Problem in Trinidad and Tobago 1953—1962 Terror and Race War in Guyana 1961-1964* (New York: iUniverse, 2009).

landslide victory with 33 seats out of 36 in the parliament.<sup>98</sup> There was reportedly an atmosphere of euphoria and high expectation at the NAR's victory. Nevertheless, unpleasant realities began to confront the new government. The citizens were equally disenchanted with the new government's inability to deliver public goods adequately and reinvigorate Trinidad and Tobago. David Abdulah posits that "[the government] certainly did not fulfill the hopes and expectations of the people for a new and better Trinidad and Tobago, and to build a trusting relationship between Government and people."<sup>99</sup> The prevailing economic downturn seemingly made it extremely challenging for the new government to deliver on its promises.

### 3. Economic Background

From the early 1970s to the mid-1980s, Trinidad and Tobago had effectively emerged as one of the most industrialized countries in the English-speaking Caribbean. Despite its small size, Trinidad and Tobago, on account of its significant hydrocarbon resources along the northern edge of the South American shelf, was one of the wealthiest, most economically developed countries in the Latin American and Caribbean regions in the early 1970s.<sup>100</sup> The standard of living during the mid-1980s was among the highest in the Western hemisphere, with a per capita income of US\$6,000. Oil exports made up about 40 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and accounted for about 80 percent of its overall exports.<sup>101</sup> The rising oil prices after 1973 doubled its GDP.<sup>102</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos observe that "the rapid accretion of oil revenues created a brief span of material prosperity, sufficiently intense to raise the expectation of the general

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<sup>98</sup> David Abdulah, "Jamaat al Muslimeen Insurrection in Trinidad and Tobago, 1990," *Caribbean Quarterly* 37, no. 2/3 (1991): 84, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40653776>.

<sup>99</sup> Abdulah, 84.

<sup>100</sup> Boodhoo, "Islamic Fundamentalism in the Caribbean (Dialogue #135)," 4.

<sup>101</sup> Robert Looney, "Once a Caribbean Success Story, Trinidad and Tobago Faces an Uncertain Future," *World Politics Review*, 2017, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/20904/once-a-caribbean-success-story-trinidad-and-tobago-faces-an-uncertain-future>.

<sup>102</sup> Boodhoo, "Islamic Fundamentalism in the Caribbean (Dialogue #135)," 4.



population.”<sup>103</sup> Trinidad became a destination where Caribbean citizens and even those from the Western hemisphere were seeking to resettle.

The global drop in oil prices, however, plummeted government revenues by 37 percent from 1981 to 1988 (TT\$4.3 billion to TT\$1.6 billion). Furthermore, the growth in the construction and agricultural sectors was inadequate to stabilize the economy.<sup>104</sup> Trinidad and Tobago became a victim of the resource curse reality, which eroded the government’s capacity to preserve order and deliver on its promises. The failure by the government made way for social discontent and industrial actions industrial actions, along with the Jamaat al Muslimeen’s (JAM) attempted coup d’état in 1990—the impacts of which still resonate today.

By the early 2000s, oil prices on the world market buoyed Trinidad and Tobago’s economy like the rising tide that lifts all boats. Growth was on an average of 6.5 percent.<sup>105</sup> Fearing to make the same mistakes of the mid-1980s, the government took stock of itself. It established a “Heritage and Stabilization Fund,” which helped balance the surpluses with low revenue exports. Robert Looney asserts that even though the fund was severely limited, its spending thus far provided a sense of softened impacts of the current economic contraction in the early 2000s and made it less severe than the contraction experienced in the 1980s.<sup>106</sup>

Today, Trinidad and Tobago is not entirely out of the economic danger zone. The socioeconomic and political institutions are still at risk due to increased crime, violence, corruption, and ethnic tension. Looney claims that these factors would have fed violent extremism and posits that stakeholders still have misgivings and fear that deteriorating conditions may not recover, even if the oil market has recovered.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, “Coup d’État Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure,” 439.

<sup>104</sup> Boodhoo, “Islamic Fundamentalism in the Caribbean (Dialogue #135),” 4.

<sup>105</sup> Looney, “Once a Caribbean Success Story, Trinidad and Tobago Faces an Uncertain Future.”

<sup>106</sup> Looney.

<sup>107</sup> Looney.

As of 2020, the United States Department of State assessed Trinidad and Tobago, particularly its capital city, Port of Spain, as a “critical-threat location,” which would affect the official United States government interests. The assessment also highlights the challenges facing the government of Trinidad and Tobago as it seeks to reduce crime. Among these challenges are bureaucratic resistance to change, coupled with competing socioeconomic factors, and an overworked judiciary. Although quite a number of the violent crimes have resulted in arrests, there has been a reduced number of prosecutions, evidencing the overburdened judicial system.<sup>108</sup>

#### **4. Demographic Overview**

Afro-Trinidadians (the descendants of slaves in Trinidad and Tobago) and Indo-Trinidadians (the descendants of indentured laborers from South Asia) dominate the population. The total population distribution as of 2020 was estimated at 40 percent Afro-Trinidadians, 40.3 percent Indo-Trinidadians, 18 percent mixed, 0.6 percent white, and 1.2 percent Chinese and other.<sup>109</sup> Although the current ethnic breakdown shows parity between the Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians, the social and cultural structures within the society of Trinidad and Tobago are heavily influenced by the Indo-Trinidadians. Christians make up 57 percent of the population, followed by Hindus at 18 percent, and Muslims at 5 percent. At least 13 percent have no professed religion.<sup>110</sup> These various segments of the population are prone to stereotyping one another. Figueira asserts that ethnic stereotyping sometimes characterizes Afro-Trinidadians as unindustrious. At the same time, other ethnicities see themselves as the drivers of the social and economic

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<sup>108</sup> United States Department of State, “Trinidad & Tobago 2020 Crime & Safety Report,” Overseas Security Advisory Council, 2020, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/TrinidadTobago/Content/Detail/Report/e71edbe1-3d87-4d1f-989d-18900d4002c6>.

<sup>109</sup> Nation’s Encyclopedia, “Ethnic Groups - Trinidad and Tobago,” Nation’s Encyclopedia, accessed May 27, 2021, <https://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Americas/Trinidad-and-Tobago-ETHNIC-GROUPS.html>.

<sup>110</sup> Sanjay Badri-Maharaj, “Globalization of the Jihadist Threat: Case Study of Trinidad and Tobago,” *Strategic Analysis* 41, no. 2 (March 4, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2017.1278880>.

wellbeing of Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, Afro-Trinidadians remain prominent components of the national identity.

In conclusion, Trinidad and Tobago has generally enjoyed a peaceful sociopolitical history since its independence. However, this status quo was interrupted by two attempts to overthrow the elected governments in 1970 and twenty years later in 1990. The former stemmed from discontent and dissatisfaction within the military, which led to mutiny but did not create much purchase. The latter, by contrast, was more significant since the attack was carried out by a fundamentalist Islamist group (JAM) and claimed the lives of 24 persons and caused millions of dollars in damages. Moreover, the group's affiliation and links to the Libyan government made it perhaps the first time that there was a nexus between international terrorist groups and local affiliates.<sup>112</sup>

## **B. BACKGROUND ON GUYANA**

Guyana is officially known as the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and it is the only English-speaking country in the South American continent. Nonetheless, it shares much of its history, cultures, and demography with the Anglophone Caribbean territories by virtue of being a former British colony. This republic is located on the North Atlantic coast of the South American continent, as seen in Figure 2, just about 663 kilometers southeast of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Guyana is 216,000 square kilometers, with a population of a little under a million people.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Figueira, *The East Indian Problem in Trinidad and Tobago 1953—1962 Terror and Race War in Guyana 1961-1964*.

<sup>112</sup> Badri-Maharaj, "Globalization of the Jihadist Threat: Case Study of Trinidad and Tobago."

<sup>113</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Details - Trinidad and Tobago."



Figure 2. Map of Guyana<sup>114</sup>

Guyana has enjoyed a low international profile over the years. The profile, however, was disrupted by one of the most harrowing tragedies in the region: the “Jonestown Massacre,” where over 900 Americans committed mass suicide on November 19, 1978, under the direction of the charismatic cult leader, Jim Jones.<sup>115</sup> This tragedy reverberates in Guyana even today and is sometimes used conveniently for ease of reference to Guyana.

### 1. Historical Overview

Guyana’s first peoples were the Amerindians, who settled there sometime during the first millennium after crossing the Bering Strait. After several centuries, these natives were quickly subjugated by European explorers and colonizers. Like Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana’s colonial history was interspersed with conquests by European colonizers to own lands. Consequently, from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, ownership of Guyana changed hands

<sup>114</sup> Central Intelligence Agency.

<sup>115</sup> Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training, “The Jonestown Massacre,” Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training, accessed May 25, 2021, <https://adst.org/2012/11/the-jonestown-massacre/>.

among the European colonizers after the Dutch established settlements there in the 1580s. By the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch had begun to import slaves from West Africa to work on their settlements.<sup>116</sup> By 1796, Guyana was taken over by the British, who formalized and expanded the plantation system to produce sugar—a profitable international trade commodity at the time. The British continued the importation of slaves from Africa. B.W. Higman posits that “the sugar revolution boosted the Atlantic slave trade, altered European nutrition, and consumption, increased European interest in tropical colonies, and contributed vitally to the industrial revolution.”<sup>117</sup> As a result of Britain’s massive sugar production in its colonies, it competed with other sugar producers and dominated the world market with low-priced sugar.<sup>118</sup>

This bonanza was eventually interrupted by the innumerable instances of resistance, defection, and revolts by the slaves in Guyana and across the Caribbean territories because of the inhumane treatment being meted out. These developments, coupled with the pressure from within Britain, contributed to the dismantling of the slavery system in Guyana. As a consequence of these dissenting voices, the British empire passed the Emancipation Act on August 1 1838, which made the buying and selling of slaves illegal.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, slaves were not freed immediately on this date. They served an additional four to six years before full freedom was granted. This period was referred to as the “apprenticeship scheme,” where freedmen were given a small wage to work on the plantation, which was intended to assist them in transitioning into freedom.<sup>120</sup> After the termination of this scheme, the freed slaves pooled their resources, purchased lands, and established their own settlements and villages.

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<sup>116</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, “Guyana - History,” accessed May 26, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Guyana>.

<sup>117</sup> B.W. Higman, “The Sugar Revolution,” *Economic History Review* LIII, no. 2 (2000): 213, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0289.00158>.

<sup>118</sup> Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and Politics of Difference*, 19.

<sup>119</sup> The National Archives, “Caribbean Histories Revealed,” The National Archives (The National Archives, Kew, Surrey TW9 4DU), accessed May 26, 2021, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/caribbeanhistory/slavery-negotiating-freedom.htm>.

<sup>120</sup> Guyana Chronicle, the Nation’s Paper, “Reflections on Emancipation Day,” Guyana Chronicle, the Nation’s Paper, August 2, 2020, <https://guyanachronicle.com/2020/08/02/reflections-on-emancipation-day/>.

The abolition of slavery placed a damper on the human resource for the operation of the sugar plantations. As with Trinidad and Tobago, indentured laborers were imported from India between 1838 and 1917 to augment the depleted labor force following the mass exodus of ex-slaves. The influx of these Indian immigrants to Guyana and other Caribbean territories during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries constituted part of a broader movement of laborers from Asia to other parts of the world. Based on the national records, Guyana received 238,909 East Indian immigrants by 1917, when the system ended.<sup>121</sup> The cessation of re-indentureship allowed the East Indians to acquire lands under their contracts, establishing their own villages and communities.

## **2. Political Background**

At the end of World War II, the first political party, the People's Progressive Party (PPP), was formed by Dr Cheddi Jagan, who won the election in May 1953. His ideologies were in tension with the colonial power at the time. Consequently, the constitution was suspended in October 1953, making way for the installing of an interim government from 1953 to 1957. The PPP won the next election of 1957 and ruled until 1961 under the same leadership. Due to disagreements and infighting, the party split with Jagan's continued leadership of the PPP to which the East Indian population gravitated. The People's National Congress (PNC), was led by Forbes Burnham with predominant support from the Afro-Guyanese quarters.<sup>122</sup> These parties effectively represented the two major ethnic groups.

During the early 1960s, Guyana experienced a period of severe social unrest and turmoil between supporters of the then two main political parties: the PPP and the PNC. The unrest marked the beginning of ethnic polarization in Guyana. Some Indo-Guyanese living in Afro-Guyanese communities sold their properties and re-settled to areas where members of their respective ethnic group were concentrated and vice versa. This settlement pattern, coupled with the chorus for decolonization during the Cold War, engendered a rethinking concerning the role of race and citizenship. It helped pushed colonies of great

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<sup>121</sup> Guyana Chronicle, the Nation's Paper, "East Indian Immigration (1838-1917)," Guyana Chronicle, the Nation's Paper, May 5, 2014, <https://guyanachronicle.com/2014/05/05/east-indian-immigration-1838-1917/>.

<sup>122</sup> David Hinds, "Ethnicity and the Elusive Quest for Power Sharing in Guyana," 2010, 334.

powers and empires toward self-determination and independence. Guyana, formerly known as British Guiana, joined the chorus and was granted its independence from Britain on May 26, 1966. Following independence, it gained republic status, under the Commonwealth, on February 23, 1970, and was renamed the Cooperative Republic of Guyana.

From the early 1990s, the two main parties coalesced with the smaller parties. As a result, the PPP was renamed the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) and the PNC, A Partnership for National Unity (APNU). The renaming was presumably aimed at signaling an appearance of being parties for all citizens. However, this effort did not achieve the desired effects for ethnic and political harmony, as the opposition continued to feel cheated at elections and its supporters continued to be suspicious of the ruling party.

Although a liberal democracy, Guyana, like Trinidad and Tobago, continues to be plagued with ethnic and cultural cleavages, which have permeated the socio-political institutions and caused friction and rancorous competition for political power, mainly between Guyanese of African and of Indian descent, respectively. The disagreements at every national general election are indicative of this fact. There are always accusations of rigged elections, which escalates to protests and violence.<sup>123</sup> The most recent example was the 2020 national general election, which took place in March 2020, with the winner not announced until August 2020, after several court proceedings. There is also a growing perception by the electorate and political figures that the United States, Canada, Britain, and the European Union meddle in elections to influence their outcomes. The United States, particularly, through the then secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, pressured the incumbent government to step aside by threatening a travel ban and other measures.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Hinds, 333.

<sup>124</sup> Amber Stewart Symone, "'Nah Tek Yuh Mattie Eye Fuh See': U.S. Involvement in the 2020 Guyanese Election | Chicago Journal of International Law," *The University of Chicago Journal of International Law*, 2021.

### 3. Economic Background

Guyana's economy was generally based on agriculture and mining, most notably sugar and bauxite, for several years following its independence. Foreign companies dominated these industries. The Booker McConnell company, out of the United Kingdom controlled the largest sugar estates.<sup>125</sup> The bauxite industry was controlled by the Aluminum Company of Canada (ALCAN), a Canadian firm, and the Reynolds Bauxite Company of the United States. Altogether, these three foreign-owned companies contributed over 80 percent of the total foreign exchange revenues.<sup>126</sup> This foreign domination of the economy was seen as an inhibitor to economic progress and prosperity, and as such, during the 1970s, the government under Burnham nationalized these major companies and instituted a 51 percent ownership of any foreign investment in the country.<sup>127</sup>

Guyana benefited tremendously from the nationalization effort for a few years. With the drop in world commodity prices during the early 1980s, however, Guyana began to experience severe economic consequences. The Hoyte administration adopted the International Monetary Fund (IMF)-backed Structural Adjustment Program in 1986—locally called the Economic Recovery Program (ERP). In effect, it was intended to reverse the then prevailing economic constraints to one of wealth restoration and growth. The process entailed two strategies—stabilization and implementation. Stabilization was intended to stop the hemorrhaging of the economy by imposing massive restrictions on government spending, among other actions. The implementation saw the integration of the parallel economy, thus eliminating payments imbalances and normalizing Guyana's relationship with its creditors.<sup>128</sup> With the aforementioned measures, the economy grew by 5 percent by 1991.

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<sup>125</sup> Tim Merrill, "Guyana: A Country Study," Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992, <http://countrystudies.us/guyana/55.htm>.

<sup>126</sup> Merrill.

<sup>127</sup> Merrill.

<sup>128</sup> Merrill.



Over time, the country showed signs of improvement and experienced economic growth. By the early 1990s, Guyana's eligibility for international financial assistance was restored, and as a consequence, there was an increase in foreign investments. Tim Merrill, in *Guyana: A Country Study*, posits that the Economic Recovery Program was the X factor, without which these changes would not have occurred.<sup>129</sup>

More importantly, the significant discovery of hydrocarbon in 2015 has projected Guyana onto the international platform. There have been 19 offshore oil discoveries between May 2015 and April 2021 by ExxonMobil, Hess Corporation, and China's National Offshore Oil Corporation.<sup>130</sup> Currently, Guyana has been exporting 120,000 barrels of oil per day. In the next five years, it is expected to produce over 500,000 more barrels per day in the next five years. Some oil and gas analysts have forecasted that Guyana's production could eclipse over 1.5 million barrels of oil per day in the next ten years<sup>131</sup>—all things being equal. This will inevitably make Guyana a major oil-producing country in the Caribbean and Western hemisphere.

The oil discovery is expected to bolster the revenues from the existing agricultural and mining sectors. The offshore oil will vastly change the outlook for Guyana—one of the poorest countries in the Western hemisphere. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) was quite optimistic about Guyana's prospects for prosperity and forecasted economic growth of 53 percent for 2020, despite the recent decline in world oil prices and the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>132</sup> At the same time, the IMF was concerned about corruption and welcomed the establishment of a Natural Resource

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<sup>129</sup> Merrill.

<sup>130</sup> Ivelaw Griffith, "Geopolitics of Oil and Water in Guyana: Part 1," *OilNow* (blog), June 17, 2021, <https://oilnow.gy/featured/geopolitics-of-oil-and-water-in-guyana-part-1-ivelaw-griffith/>.

<sup>131</sup> "Guyana's Oil Industry Creating Headaches for Competitors in the Middle East, Africa, and South America," *Guyana Petroleum Digest: North American Edition* (blog), 2021, <https://guyanapetroleumdigest.ca/2021/04/03/guyanas-oil-industry-creating-headaches-for-competitors-in-middle-east-africa-and-south-america/>.

<sup>132</sup> Mark P Sullivan, "Guyana: An Overview," World Health Organization, 2020, <https://pesquisa.bvsalud.org/global-literature-on-novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov/resource/pt/grc-740750?lang=en>.

Sovereign Fund to manage the country's oil wealth,<sup>133</sup> and an added a layer of transparency. The government of Guyana proposed Norway's model for transformational projects that will benefit generations to come.

#### 4. Demographic Overview

Guyana is a multi-ethnic society with East Indians (Indo-Guyanese) accounting for 39 percent of the population, followed by citizens of African descent (Afro-Guyanese) accounting for 29.3 percent, mixed at 19.9 percent, Amerindians (the indigenous peoples) at 10.5 percent, and others accounting for 0.5 percent. The others comprise Portuguese, Chinese, and Europeans.<sup>134</sup> The country is divided mainly along with the three dominant religions: Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, with Christianity being the most dominant and having adherents from the ethnic groups. Christians account for 64 percent of the population, Hindus 24.8 percent, Muslims 6.8 percent, and the other small religious groups represent the remaining 4.5 percent.<sup>135</sup>

Chickrie posits that “the Mandingo and Fulani Muslims were the first brought from West Africa to work on Guyana's sugar plantations.”<sup>136</sup> The brutality of slavery reportedly prevented the practice of Islam from being practiced by the black slaves, and the religion was apparently non-existent until the arrival of East Indian immigrants in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>137</sup> The religion of Islam was officially reintroduced in Guyana by these immigrants, among whom were some Muslims. Chickrie notes that during one of the plantation revolts, the criteria for resolution were purportedly penned in Arabic by Cuffy, a slave who led a rebellion against Dutch plantation owners in 1763.<sup>138</sup> The conditions written in Arabic language created a nexus between Cuffy and Islam. Today, Muslims in

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<sup>133</sup> Sullivan.

<sup>134</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Details - Trinidad and Tobago.”

<sup>135</sup> Central Intelligence Agency.

<sup>136</sup> Chickrie, “Muslims in Guyana: History, Traditions, Conflict and Change,” *chic*.

<sup>137</sup> Chickrie, “Muslims in Guyana: History, Traditions, Conflict and Change.”

<sup>138</sup> Chickrie.

Guyana are referred to as *Fula* in some quarters—a pseudonym, which links them to their West African origin.<sup>139</sup>

## 5. Guyana’s Susceptibility to Violent Extremism

Although there is a sizeable Muslim community in Guyana, literature on Guyana’s predisposition to radical Islamic extremism is scant. Nevertheless, the sentencing of Russell Defreitas and his co-defendant, Abdul Kadir, both Muslim, as shown in Figures 3, both Muslims of Guyanese descent, warrants a study on Guyana’s susceptibility to Islamic extremism. Their reported links to militant groups and Iran has certainly hastened the need. They were part of a plot to blow up the John F. Kennedy (JFK) Airport to mirror the 9/11 attacks.<sup>140</sup>



Figure 3. Picture of Abdul Kadir (left); artist’s sketch of Russell Defreitas (right)<sup>141</sup>

The evidence at these trials confirmed the intent of these two individuals to project violence for political and religious ideals. The idea to attack JFK Airport was originated

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<sup>139</sup> Chickrie.

<sup>140</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Abdul Kadir Sentenced to Life in Prison for Conspiring to Commit Terrorist Attack at JFK Airport,” FBI New York Field Office, 2010, <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/newyork/press-releases/2010/nyfo121510a.htm>.

<sup>141</sup> “BREAKING: Terrorism Convict, Guyanese Abdul Kadir Dies in U.S. Prison,” News Source Guyana, June 28, 2018, <https://newsourcegy.com/news/breaking-terrorism-convict-guyanese-abdul-kadir-dies-in-u-s-prison/>; BBC News, “Life Sentence for Russell Defreitas in JFK Bomb Plot.”

by Defreitas, who recruited Kadir, a trained engineer affiliated with militant groups in other regions. Kadir also provided other services such as advice on explosives, bank accounts to finance terrorist activities, and links to persons with terrorism expertise.<sup>142</sup> Kadir, according to a report by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) “believed himself bound to follow fatwas from Iranian religious leaders.”<sup>143</sup> By his admission during the trial, Kadir indicated that he would have communicated sensitive information about Guyana and its security systems to Iranian religious leaders.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, the United States authorities were able to establish links between the JAM and Kadir.<sup>145</sup> The evidence that was unearthed during the investigation and trial left little doubt that violence was the selected instrument to achieve political and religious goals.

Guyana’s geography, and its current social and political status, could predispose it to violent extremism. It sits in a continent where actors have used violence or force within several states to achieve political objectives. Suriname, its immediate neighbor to the east, experienced a violent military coup in 1980, when a group of 16 non-commissioned officers, led by Dési Bouterse, overthrew Prime Minister Henck Arron.<sup>146</sup> In 1964, the Brazilian president, João Goulart, was overthrown by the military and had to flee to Uruguay for sanctuary.<sup>147</sup> From 1945 to the early 1990s, Venezuela experienced more than a dozen violent coup attempts. The government managed to deflect such attacks from the early 1960s.<sup>148</sup> Although military men instigated these overthrows, they could still

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<sup>142</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Abdul Kadir Sentenced to Life in Prison for Conspiring to Commit Terrorist Attack at JFK Airport.”

<sup>143</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<sup>144</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<sup>145</sup> Aviation Pros, “Profile of Abdul Kadir: Disbelief in His Hometown,” Aviation Pros, June 4, 2007, <https://www.aviationpros.com/home/news/10388411/profile-of-abdul-kadir-disbelief-in-his-hometown>.

<sup>146</sup> Organization of American States, “Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Suriname,” Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 1983, <http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/Suriname83eng/intro.htm>.

<sup>147</sup> NACLA, “Remembering Brazil’s Military Coup 50 Years Later,” NACLA, 2014, <https://nacla.org/news/2014/4/1/remembering-brazils-military-coup-50-years-later>.

<sup>148</sup> Sergei Baburkin et al., “The 1992 Coup Attempts in Venezuela: Causes and Failure,” *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* 27, no. 1 (1999): 141–54, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45294157>.

motivate civilian copycats who are so desirous of achieving political and religious goals, using violence as the instrument.

Over the years, the Guyanese have been boastful of being the only South American country that did not experience a coup or extremist violence. This unique circumstance could be short-lived, however, according to Brad J. Bushman's blog on "How Violence Spreads Like a Contagious Disease." He posits that violence seldomly occurs randomly but rather in clusters, often among individuals in the same social network. This echoes the position of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that "violence begets violence,"<sup>149</sup> Therefore, acknowledging the theory that violence is contagious and Guyana's location in a region permeated by violence, I am firmly wedded to the idea that non-state actors like Islamic extremists and other militant groups within Guyana could be motivated to use violence as an instrument to gain political power.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Single Market and Economy (CSME), of which Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago are signatories, is a treaty among the CARICOM member states to create a single expanded economic space. Although this treaty allows for economic development and prosperity for its members, the ease of movement provided under the treaty could facilitate organized crimes and the proliferation of radical groups. It allows goods, services, capital, and technology from within the region (CARICOM) to move from one state to the other without yielding to barriers that have previously prevented such activities.<sup>150</sup>

Now that Guyana is officially an oil-producing country, it is more vulnerable to violent extremism. This is particularly concerning since the trend in violence in oil-producing countries has not declined.<sup>151</sup> In fact, Ross adds that "with violence falling in general, oil-producing states make up a growing fraction of the world's conflict-ridden

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<sup>149</sup> Brad J. Bushman, "How Violence Spreads Like a Contagious Disease," *Psychology Today* (blog), May 31, 2017, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/get-psyched/201705/how-violence-spreads-contagious-disease>.

<sup>150</sup> Ministry of Foreign and Caribbean Community Affairs, "Caribbean Community Single Market and Economy," Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, accessed October 19, 2021, <https://foreign.gov.tt/services/csme/>.

<sup>151</sup> Ross, "Blood Barrels: Why Oil Wealth Fuels Conflicts."

countries.”<sup>152</sup> One of the main reasons for these projections of violence is that the fall in the oil prices could have devastating impacts on the economy, leading to violent unrest. Another reason is that revenues from oil resources tend to strengthen the hands of dictators and erode democratic rule.<sup>153</sup>

In conclusion, Guyana and Trinidad share several similar sociopolitical and economic histories and realities. The free movement of persons between these two countries makes interactions among persons seamless. The geography and accent are arguably the few factors that separate these two countries from each other. Post-independence saw political parties in both countries leveraging the ethnic division between Blacks and Indians to gain the upper hand in elections. Both countries continue to experience an extremely high correlation between ethnicity and political behavior, even though their respective politicians claim to represent all the peoples.<sup>154</sup> For the most part, the varying intensity of tensions in these countries generally manifests itself in the competition for elected offices. This behavior could be conjoined with the theory of cultural pluralism, which J. S. Furnivall originally developed to explain this theoretical framework in Southeast Asia. He argues that “the political structure of plural societies consists largely of the relations between their component cultural sections, and changes in this system of intersectional relations occur together with changes in the political constitution of the unit as a whole.”<sup>155</sup> Both countries become home to distinct and often inharmonious groups, who use politics as a conduit for expressing hostility or desires for domination.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Ross, 1.

<sup>153</sup> Ross, 2.

<sup>154</sup> Victor C. Ferkiss and Barbara Ferkiss, “Race and Politics in Trinidad and Guyana,” *World Affairs* 134, no. 1 (1971): 5–23, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20671264>.

<sup>155</sup> Ferkiss and Ferkiss.

<sup>156</sup> Merrill, “Guyana: A Country Study.”

### III. THE RISE OF THE JAMAAT AL MUSLIMEEN

The emergence of the Jamaat al Muslimeen (or JAM), an Islamist group, effectively occurred in the early 1980s, when Trinidad and Tobago was experiencing severe socioeconomic upheaval and heightened racial tensions between its two dominant ethnic groups.<sup>157</sup> The JAM also rose in an era characterized by mass consumerism, a heightened sense of individualism, and burgeoning resentment—a period designated by Eric Hobsbawm as “The Crisis Decades,” beginning in 1973. This crisis was precipitated by the Yom Kippur War in the Middle East, a spike in oil prices by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and the simultaneous reduction in oil production—all of which contributed to the subsequent economic recession in the Western world.<sup>158</sup> Like many Western countries, Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean region were not spared from the scourge.<sup>159</sup>

The JAM was an amalgamation of a few Afro-Trinidadian fundamentalist splinter groups (a makeup it more or less still maintains today) within the *ummah*.<sup>160</sup> These splinter groups were the results of exclusion by the mainstream Muslims, who held the view that Islam is a religion for people of Indian or Arabian origin. Figueira refers to the mindset as the “Indianization of Islam,”<sup>161</sup> which is discussed more fully in the next chapter. The group’s founder, Yassin Abu Bakr, adopted pan-African ideals, which galvanized a heightened sense of Black consciousness among the group’s followers. The group’s advocacy of appealed more to the Black underclass, who were severely affected by economic repression in the country at the time.<sup>162</sup> With the emergence of identity politics

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<sup>157</sup> Zambelis, “Jamaat Al-Muslimeen: The Growth and Decline of Islamist Militancy in Trinidad and Tobago.”

<sup>158</sup> Alastair Couper, “The Crisis Decades,” *Maritime Policy & Management* 25, no. 3 (2006): 208, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03088839800000034>.

<sup>159</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, “Coup d’État Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure,” 440.

<sup>160</sup> McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends,” 275.

<sup>161</sup> Figueira, *Jihad in Trinidad and Tobago*, 11.

<sup>162</sup> Zambelis, “Jamaat Al-Muslimeen: The Growth and Decline of Islamist Militancy in Trinidad and Tobago.”

in the 1960s as a social phenomenon,<sup>163</sup> the group was also able to reassert a profound sense of identity and provide ameliorative support to disadvantaged Black youths. The JAM grew into a radical movement and, unbeknownst to the broader society, ultimately carried out a deadly attack on the government of Trinidad and Tobago on July 27 1990.

This chapter examines the development of the JAM from the early 1980s to the year it carried out the bizarre attack, focusing on the founder of the group and its ideology, which partly contributed to its radicalization. The chapter also gives an overview of the actual coup d'état and how it impacted the region and the group's status post-July 27, 1990.

#### **A. YASSIN ABU BAKR**

The JAM's founder, Abu Bakr, formerly Lennox Phillips, became renowned in Trinidad and Tobago and the Western hemisphere during the early 1990s. He was born in 1941 and was the eighth of 15 children. He joined the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) in 1959.<sup>164</sup> The TTPS left his ambitions unfulfilled, and after serving for about nine years, Phillips migrated to Canada in 1968.<sup>165</sup> While overseas in Toronto, he became immersed in the civil rights movement, where he openly protested against discrimination and injustices through the employment of Black-power principles.<sup>166</sup> He eventually became a convert to a Pan-African revolutionary style of Islam, which had solid underpinnings in the Nation of Islam.<sup>167</sup>

He then left his family in Canada and returned to Trinidad and Tobago on November 25 1978, as a Muslim convert, with his name changed from Lennox Phillip to Yasin Abu Bakr. In Trinidad and Tobago, he established a small mosque, which functioned

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<sup>163</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, "Coup d'État Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure," 62.

<sup>164</sup> Boodhoo, "Islamic Fundamentalism in the Caribbean (Dialogue #135)," 14.

<sup>165</sup> Boodhoo, 14.

<sup>166</sup> McCoy and Knight, "Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends," 274.

<sup>167</sup> McCoy and Knight, 274.



as the Caribbean branch of the Black Panther organization headquartered in the United States.<sup>168</sup> In 1982, he was elected as the head of the JAM.

## **B. IDEOLOGY**

The group embraced Islamic Salafism, a puritanical interpretation of Sunni Islam wherein they compared Trinidad and Tobago to Sodom and Gomorrah<sup>169</sup>—two implacably sinful cities mentioned in the Qur’an and the Bible. Collihan and Danopoulos assert that “for Bakr, the nation was corrupt and was in the hands of evil men; his mission was to chart a new national direction inspired by the will of Allah.”<sup>170</sup> This Islamic philosophy infiltrated the *ummah* in Trinidad and Tobago during the early 1980s from the interaction of local Islamic scholars, who benefited from scholarships in Saudi Arabia.<sup>171</sup> Abu Bakr and JAM openly criticized the government on corrupt practices and over racism, poverty, and injustices, which were being meted out to Afro-Trinidadian and Tobagonian communities. The group also abhorred the consumption of alcohol, the use of narcotics, and participation in the local cultural practices surrounding carnivals.<sup>172</sup> They vehemently condemned these practices and associated them with *jahiliya*—an Islamic concept that refers to a period of ignorance or darkness.

The JAM also became rooted in the urban African milieu by attracting disadvantaged and marginalized black youths, especially those from the violent and criminal hotspots.<sup>173</sup> JAM’s prominence became apparent during the economic crisis in Trinidad and Tobago in the late 1980s, coupled with the heightened ethnic tensions between Afro and Indo-Trinidadians. It capitalized on the prevailing economic and social discontent and emerged as a hybrid of a social and religious movement, which attracted an

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<sup>168</sup> Selwyn Ryan, *The Muslimeen Grab for Power: Race, Religion and Revolution in Trinidad and Tobago* (Trinidad and Tobago: Inprint Caribbean, 1991).

<sup>169</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, “Coup d’État Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure,” 441.

<sup>170</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, 441.

<sup>171</sup> McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends,” 272.

<sup>172</sup> McCoy and Knight, 275.

<sup>173</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, “Coup d’État Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure,” 441.

average of 300 to 500 members at the time of the attempted coup d'état.<sup>174</sup> McCoy and Knight indicate that “in [Trinidad and Tobago], JAM claims to advocate for all Afro-Trinidadians and Tobagonians, Muslim and non-Muslim, by actively opposing the discrimination they face in local society, politics, and the economy.”<sup>175</sup>

Nevertheless, this movement was marred by its suspected involvement in criminal activities, and suspicion, which emerged from its recruitment bases in violent and criminal areas. Mahabir claims that “the [JAM’s] history of political militancy is only matched by the group’s criminal activities, which included gangland-style killings, narcotics and arms trafficking, money laundering, extortion, kidnapping, and political corruption.”<sup>176</sup> Abu Bakr and the JAM were seemingly able to project a façade of being advocates for the causes of the Black underclass for several years as a shield for their felonious activities.

### **C. THE DEVELOPING RADICALIZATION OF THE JAM**

The JAM’s formation mirrored the formation of many radical groups in several ways, starting from its emergence as a social movement then evolving into radical Islamist group as environmental events and phenomena unfolded. It exemplified the consensus view among scholars that “radicalization is usually a (1) gradual ‘process’ that entails socialization into a (2) extremist belief system that sets the stage for (3) violence.”<sup>177</sup> The literature is scant on the time needed to complete the radicalization process. The JAM took approximately ten years, which in my estimation was enough time for the radicalization process to ferment. The JAM’s organization enabled the socialization aspect of the process into closed communities and isolation from the rest of the society. This isolation allowed for the uninhibited dissemination of information and indoctrination. The JAM also maintained an international network not only with the Nation of Islam but also with Sudan, where members of the group attended Islamic conferences; with Saudi Arabia, where

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<sup>174</sup> Mahabir, “Allah’s Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago,” 65.

<sup>175</sup> McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends,” 275.

<sup>176</sup> Mahabir, “Allah’s Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago,” 68.

<sup>177</sup> Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” 960.

scholarships were offered to the wider Islamic community; and with Libya where finances, weapons, and training were secretly acquired to set the stage for the application of violence when required.<sup>178</sup>

This movement eventually became prominent and emerged as the de facto local government through the provision of welfare services in areas that were ostensibly neglected by the state.<sup>179</sup> In some areas, the JAM was even more effective than the state institutions.<sup>180</sup> It provided everything from medical services, food supplies, and even eyeglasses for disadvantaged Afro-Trinidadians.<sup>181</sup> Ken Boodhoo asserts that “his [Bakr’s] followers believed that for the first time they had found hope and a purpose to a formerly meaningless existence.”<sup>182</sup> The JAM used its social welfare services agenda to launch its political strategies.

Bakr and the JAM eventually became emboldened and began to exhibit open defiance of the law and challenge state authorities. One such prominent case was Bakr and the JAM’s refusal to vacate a property that belonged to the City of Port of Spain after being served with a notice from the court to do so.<sup>183</sup> They remained and continued with developmental works on the property. Bakr was subsequently charged, tried, and sentenced in absentia to 21 days in jail for contempt of court but never served a day.<sup>184</sup> The police effort to arrest him proved futile, as they were greeted with protest and resistance from his followers, especially by women and children.<sup>185</sup> Additionally, his reach from corrupt

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<sup>178</sup> McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends,” 277.

<sup>179</sup> McCoy and Knight, 275.

<sup>180</sup> John Laguerre, “The 1990 Violent Disturbance in Trinidad & Tobago: Some Perceptions,” 2008, 133.

<sup>181</sup> McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends,” 275.

<sup>182</sup> Boodhoo, “Islamic Fundamentalism in the Caribbean (Dialogue #135),” 12.

<sup>183</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, “Coup d’État Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure,” 442.

<sup>184</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, 442.

<sup>185</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, 442.

elements within the TTPS to politicians provided him with insulation from prosecution.<sup>186</sup> McCoy and Knight posit that “through mixing political, social welfare, and militant activities the group displays some aspects of what Boaz Ganor describes as a ‘hybrid terrorist organization,’ similar to groups like Hezbollah and Hamas.”<sup>187</sup> More details and analyses on the radicalization of the JAM appear in Chapter IV.

#### **D. THE DEADLY ATTEMPTED COUP D’ÉTAT**

On July 27, 1990, a day when the public was oblivious, the JAM carried out a deadly attack on the government. Members of the security forces were off duty, and the general public was preoccupied with a football final when 114 members of the JAM, led by Abu Bakr, stormed the national assembly of Trinidad and Tobago while it was in session. The JAM held the entire cabinet of ministers of government hostage. The insurgents simultaneously seized the Trinidad and Tobago Television (TTT) station, the country’s sole television station; the National Broadcasting Service (NBS Radio); and the central police station in the capital. At the radio station, Abu Bakr told the public that the government had been overthrown and that his group was in full control of the state.

This siege lasted for six days during which 24 people were killed, including a minister of government and several police officers, and over 100 were injured, including the Prime Minister, who was tortured and shot in the leg. Collihan and Donapoulos assert that “the coup attempt was perceived by the Muslimeen as a response to a divine calling aimed to eliminate social ills and religious inequalities.”<sup>188</sup> After prolonged negotiation, the siege was lifted and an amnesty agreement was signed on August 1 between Abu Bakr and the captive Prime Minister. As a consequence, Abu Bakr and more than 100 of his

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<sup>186</sup> Moshe Terdman, “Radical Islam in the Caribbean Basin: A Local Problem or a Global Threat?” 2007, 9.

<sup>187</sup> McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends,” 275.

<sup>188</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, “Coup d’État Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure,” 442.

followers escaped criminal prosecution, to the indignation of many.<sup>189</sup> Subsequent attempts to retract the pardon were unsuccessful in the courts.

No one will ever know whether the attack on the government of Trinidad and Tobago by this radical group could have been prevented. Nevertheless, the Commission of Inquiry (COI) laid the blame squarely on the dereliction of duty by the Special Branch (SB), the investigative agency that underestimated the JAM and failed to take heed of the available intelligence. The evidence, as recorded in the COI, suggests an intelligence failure on the part of the SB. Mahabir points out also that the police failed to confront the JAM's paramilitary activities and "challenge the group's illegal accumulation of arms, although they were fully informed about this stockpile as early as in 1988."<sup>190</sup>

The SB was privy to information that Abu Bakr and the JAM were planning to depose the government of Trinidad and Tobago and create an Islamic state. Yet Bakr's ambition was apparently taken too lightly by the SB. The Commission of Enquiry reports that after Bakr's return from a visit to Libya in the late 1980s, he, under surveillance by the SB, addressed over 500 members of the JAM and expressed grave disappointment over the performance of the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) government.<sup>191</sup> He believed that the Libyan system of government should be implemented in Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>192</sup> He openly labeled the government as a failure during its three years in office. This address was effectively filled with overtones of violent intent, which went unheeded by the security agencies. The Commission of Enquiry also records that Abu Bakr, during his address to his members, indicated that "it was decreed by Allah that Muslims have to change the system. There is no other time to change but now."<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> BBC News, "Trinidad Marks 1990 Coup Attempt," *BBC News*, July 27, 2010, sec. Latin America & Caribbean, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-10774647>.

<sup>190</sup> Mahabir, "Allah's Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago," 66.

<sup>191</sup> Sommons et al., "Report of the Commission of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into the Events Surrounding the Attempted Coup D'état of 27th July 1990," 616.

<sup>192</sup> Sir. David Sommons et al., "Report of the Commission of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into the Events Surrounding the Attempted Coup D'état of July 27 1990," 2014, 734.

<sup>193</sup> Sommons et al., 734.

These statements and Bakr’s trip to Libya spoke to the intent of the group to carry out an insurrection.<sup>194</sup> The Commission also details that the SB was cognizant of reports of a plot by members of the JAM to kill the Prime Minister, A.N.R Robinson.<sup>195</sup> Amid the reports, there was one of an active plot to depose the government, acquire resources and military training—which were facilitated by the government of Libya—to smuggle arms into the country from the United States and secure a safe house.<sup>196</sup> Corrupt members of the Customs office assisted with the clearance of these prohibited items.<sup>197</sup> Although the literature is scant on the reasons for the relevant authorities’ failure to take heed of the information available at the time, Collihan and Danopoulos posit that “the government dismissed Bakr’s warning as the intellectual rantings of a powerless madman.”<sup>198</sup>

#### **E. THE IMPACT OF THE ATTACK**

The attack reverberated across the entire Caribbean region and the Western hemisphere. No one expected that an attack of this magnitude could have taken place in a region that normally enjoys a peaceful and genial atmosphere.<sup>199</sup> Islamist radicalism was essentially exogenous to the region, which at the time felt a sense of immunity to violence of that nature and that those attacks only occurred in other regions.<sup>200</sup> The insurrection loomed largely in the minds of policymakers and governments within the region, who at the time were seemingly fearful that similar attacks could be meted out to them by disenchanting groups. The attack was the first of its kind and represented the only insurrection in the region and the wider Western hemisphere that is linked to an Islamist

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<sup>194</sup> McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends.”

<sup>195</sup> Sommons et al., “Report of the Commission of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into the Events Surrounding the Attempted Coup D’état of July 27 1990,” 616.

<sup>196</sup> McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends,” 277.

<sup>197</sup> McCoy and Knight, 277.

<sup>198</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, “Coup d’État Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure,” 444.

<sup>199</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, 444.

<sup>200</sup> McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends,” 275.

group.<sup>201</sup> The group's use of violence as an instrument to achieve political and religious goals, and its possible reach and influence in other Caribbean territories, continue to be security concerns for governments and policymakers.

Even though the attack might have been a defining moment for Bakr and the JAM, it certainly changed the way governments conducted business, particularly in Trinidad and Tobago. After the restoration of order, there was a need for all stakeholders to regroup and chart the course going forward. Efforts had to be redirected towards the reassurance of confidence and safety to the citizenry, and the prevention of a reoccurrence. What had become evident after the attempted coup d'état was that governments were now measured and scrutinized by their ability to deliver on their promises to improve the lives of citizens, especially those disadvantaged.<sup>202</sup>

The incident shattered the sense of security and safety of the general population. It also changed the public perception of the group from a religious welfare group to a criminal entity. Governments within the region and the Western hemisphere, the wider Muslim community, other stakeholders, and the wider cross-section of Trinidad and Tobago vehemently condemned the attack. On the other hand, the Afro-Trinidadians, for the most part, shared different sentiments. They claimed that the action by the JAM brought the government to its senses and provided a catalyst for change.<sup>203</sup>

## **F. JAM AFTER THE COUP D'ÉTAT**

Since the failed coup d'état, the JAM has evolved. Its cause continued to diminish; Bakr's stranglehold on the JAM eroded progressively, and the group splintered into several factions with ties to criminal enterprises.<sup>204</sup> The consensus of several scholars is that the JAM has continued to be perceived increasingly as a criminal organization that has misplaced its impact, and that despite the group's international connection, its militant

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<sup>201</sup> McCoy and Knight, 275.

<sup>202</sup> Laguerre, "The 1990 Violent Disturbance In Trinidad & Tobago," 138.

<sup>203</sup> Mahabir, "Allah's Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago," 67.

<sup>204</sup> McCoy and Knight, "Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends," 277.

modus operandi has effectively been localized. Mahabir argues that often the criminal activities of some of these social groups are scarcely analyzed—especially crimes that often take place concurrently with assertions of religious claims and social welfare outreach.<sup>205</sup>

The amnesty agreement signed by the Prime Minister was repudiated by the government and deemed to have been completed under duress. Bakr and his assailants were arrested and charged for treason and sedition. The court upheld the amnesty as valid and Bakr and his men were released in 1992.<sup>206</sup> The government has since exhibited a duplicitous policy towards the group by utilizing every opportunity to prosecute them, which has renewed some fears of violence among the population. For instance, in 2005 Abu Bakr faced charges for inciting comments he articulated during an *Eid al-Fitr* sermon in which he threatened the local Muslims with violence if they failed to donate *zakat* (obligatory charity).<sup>207</sup>

To preserve its existence and remain relevant, the JAM essentially shifted from its violent focus and became more involved in economic and sociopolitical projects through its political wing, the New National Vision (NNV) Labor Party.<sup>208</sup> It contested in the 2015 and 2020 general elections but failed to win any seats. The objective of this party as detailed in its manifesto is to establish an environment within which all Trinidadians and Tobagonians can thrive and prosper. While it may seem that the NNV wants to distance itself from the scourge associated with terrorism or crimes, the leadership frequently finds itself directly associated with JAM.<sup>209</sup> The party is currently headed by Bakr's son, Fuad Abu Bakr.

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<sup>205</sup> Mahabir, "Allah's Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago," 61.

<sup>206</sup> Mahabir, 68.

<sup>207</sup> McCoy and Knight, "Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends," 277.

<sup>208</sup> Brandon Oliveira and Darby Aviles, "Disrupting Emerging Networks: Analyzing and Evaluating Jamaat al-Muslimeen (JAM) and the Development of an Extremist Threat in the Caribbean" (Master's Thesis, Monterey, The Naval Postgraduate School, 2012), 17, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/7396>.

<sup>209</sup> Oliveira and Aviles, 18.



## G. CONCLUSION

The nature of the external environment at the time made the emergence of the JAM almost inevitable, particularly for disadvantaged and marginalized Afro-Trinidadians and Tobagonians, Muslims, and non-Muslims, who were clamoring for socioeconomic justice. The rise of the JAM is an excellent example of how social groups with legitimate goals and objectives could transform and adopt violent radicalism. JAM started as a religious group with a welfare service agenda aimed at providing ameliorative assistance and services to the Black underclass. Yet, in combination with unfolding socioeconomic factors in the country, it metamorphosed into a radical group, which inexorably led to the deadly attack on the government of Trinidad and Tobago. Chapter IV further examines these factors and shows how the radicalization of the JAM was a bi-product of these factors. Since the attack, the group has struggled to remain relevant within the *ummah* and the wider society.

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#### IV. THE SYNERGY OF FACTORS BEHIND THE RADICALIZATION OF THE JAMAAT AL MUSLIMEEN

A synergy of factors contributed to the radicalization of the JAM and its evolution to violent extremism. The JAM was committed at its inception to undertake good deeds and abstain from behavior that conflicted with Quranic principles.<sup>210</sup> Nevertheless, within ten years, they remade themselves into agents of social terror.<sup>211</sup> The JAM emerged out of the mindset of the “Indianization of Islam.” It then evolved with the influence of other factors at different stages of its existence, as seen in Figure 4. The ethnic polarization and economic repression that pervaded Trinidad and Tobago fed into the JAM’s ideology, thus adding to the group’s cause. Furthermore, the court’s decision to confiscate the JAM’s compound aggrieved the group to the point where they put the violent plan into action.

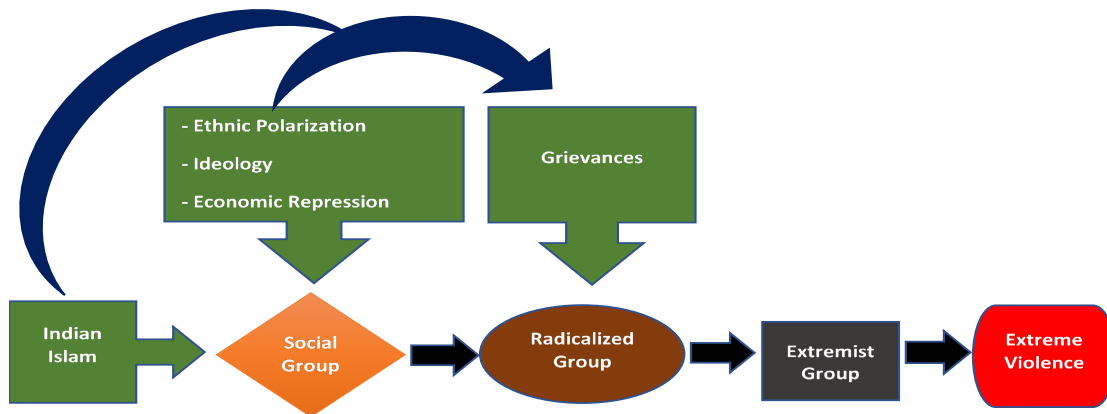


Figure 4. Diagram showing the evolution of the JAM

Economic underdevelopment is the most common and dominant factor presented consistently in the literature as a precursor to violent extremism.<sup>212</sup> In light of this,

<sup>210</sup> Mahabir, “Allah’s Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago,” 60.

<sup>211</sup> Mahabir, 60.

<sup>212</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, “Coup d’État Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure,” 436.

Collihan and Danopoulos referred to O’Kane, who posited that countries with export-based economies are predisposed to coups.<sup>213</sup> A drastic change in the international demand or price of these goods could lead to severe economic and social dislocations beyond the control of individual governments. Such a situation would inevitably establish the conditions for hostility towards the government by affected groups or individuals.

This researcher, however, departs from the theory that a single factor contributed to the radicalization and violent extremism of the JAM. I instead argue that the JAM emerged as a socio-religious movement, morphed into a radicalized group, and then evolved into a violent extremist group and that a synergy of factors contributed to its evolution. As the factors unfolded and compounded, the radicalization intensified.

This chapter examines the five factors that best explain the evolution of the JAM—the “Indianization of Islam,” ideology, ethnic polarization, economic repression, and grievances. These interconnected factors collectively radicalized the JAM, which led to the unprecedented and deadly attack on the government of Trinidad and Tobago on July 27, 1990.

#### **A. INDIANIZATION OF ISLAM**

Traditionally, Islam and Hinduism were religions essentially for Indo-Trinidadians, and Christianity was practiced mostly by Afro-Trinidadians. The mainstream Muslims saw the acceptance of Islam by Afro-Trinidadians as an imitation of Indo-Trinidadians’ faith and culture.<sup>214</sup> Figueira, in his book, *Jihad in Trinidad and Tobago, July 27, 1990*, used the concept of the “Indianization of Islam” to develop the notion that Islam was viewed among the Indo-Trinidadians as a religion that was purely for Arabs and Indians and that Afro-Trinidadians had no place in it.

This view was effectively the starting point for the contentious relationship between the Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians within the *ummah*. It partly had its roots in the sectarian exclusion of the Shia Muslims from the mainstream *ummah*. In 1882, a petition was filed

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<sup>213</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, 436.

<sup>214</sup> Figueira, *Jihad in Trinidad and Tobago*.

by the Sunni Muslims to the then Colonial Governor, Sir Stanford Freeling, to discontinue the Shi'ite festival of Muharram—a festival of grief that Muslims and non-Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago used to celebrate the remembrance of Imam Hosein (Prophet Muhammad's grandson).<sup>215</sup> Sunni Muslims claimed that the celebration was un-Islamic and that it was in contention with the teachings of the Qur'an.

They also insisted that the procession of *Taziya* (a parade with a replica of a tomb of Imam Hosein) was tantamount to idol worshipping, which the religion vehemently abhors.<sup>216</sup> The colonial government's view of Muharram suddenly changed, and the festival soon became effrontery to them; by 1884, British colonial police dismantled a procession by relentlessly firing at it.<sup>217</sup> The action by the British, together with the petition, inevitably excluded the Shi'ite Muslims from the *ummah* and created an Islamic hegemony of Sunnis.<sup>218</sup> This was followed by the exclusion of the non-Indians, who had been embracing the religion.

The praxis continued for decades, during which the Sunnis deemed all other ethnic Islamic groups as outside the realm of Islam. Advocates of the established order called on the colonial government at the time to dissolve any such group.<sup>219</sup> Additionally, the mainstream Muslims even saw the Afro-Muslims as outcasts, yet the latter insisted on being recognized as Muslims. The insistence was futile as it was almost impossible for the Afro-Muslims to assimilate into the mainstream *ummah* easily. By this the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Islam in Trinidad and Tobago also became exclusive, and the universality of the religion eroded.<sup>220</sup>

The clamor by the Afro-Muslims to be identified with the mainstream hastened the emergence of the JAM. The JAM exploited this desire and assured a sense of social

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<sup>215</sup> Figueira, 22.

<sup>216</sup> Figueira, 23.

<sup>217</sup> Figueira, 25.

<sup>218</sup> Figueira, 24.

<sup>219</sup> Figueira, 24.

<sup>220</sup> Figueira, 24.

identity, making the foundation upon which the JAM was established one of acrimony and grievance. The established order also created a cavity for “cognitive openings,” as pointed out by Wiktorowicz, where those who felt marginalized within the *ummah* pursued available avenues for remedies and answers to pressing Islamic concerns. He argues that several events can prompt cognitive openings: experiences with discrimination, socioeconomic crises, political repression, among other factors.<sup>221</sup> For several decades, the *ummah* remained divided between in-groups (us) and out-groups (them) until the 1970s and 1980s, when several organizations challenged the hegemony produced by “Indian Islam” and saw it as repugnant to the religion (*munkar*).<sup>222</sup>

The seed of radicalization was effectively planted during the period of the “Indianization of Islam.” The relationship between the two groups (mainstream Muslims and the JAM) became acrimonious. The former felt that the JAM threatened their domination in the religion.<sup>223</sup> The discriminatory treatment of Black Muslims by mainstream Muslims was enough to ignite disenchantment and a willingness to adopt extremist views. Bakr used the opportunity to instill the Black Power ideals and drew political and religious energies from revolutionary movements,<sup>224</sup> which aggravated the existing enmity.

## **B. IDEOLOGY**

Ideology is essentially the center of gravity for most radical extremist groups. It provides the source from which adherents get their motivation, will, and energy to carry out a group mandate. Hafez and Mullins define it as an idealistic worldview that is rooted in transcendental philosophies and is conflated with radicalism.<sup>225</sup> They also claim that “ideology can help forge a new rebellious identity by appealing to symbols, narratives,

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<sup>221</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, 5.

<sup>222</sup> Figueira, *Jihad in Trinidad and Tobago*, 49.

<sup>223</sup> Collihan and Danopoulos, “Coup d’État Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure,” 441.

<sup>224</sup> McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends,” 274.

<sup>225</sup> Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” 966.

mythologies, and rituals that give meaning to acts of personal risk and sacrifice.”<sup>226</sup> The society of Trinidad and Tobago was viewed by the JAM as secular, ignorant of divine guidance, and paganistic (*jahiliya*). The view, coupled with the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which saw the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, resonated with the sociopolitical ambitions of the JAM.<sup>227</sup>

Education and the construction of an ideological framework are central to the radicalization process. Adherents, both moderates and radicals, spend the bulk of their time and energy on religious learning to fulfill their obligation to God, as outlined in the Qur’an and the *Sunnah*.<sup>228</sup> The ideology provides a logically coherent belief system based on an interpretation of the scriptures, which lend themselves to various interpretations to fit a particular vision or desired outcome. Hafez, in “Takfir and Violence against Muslims,” argues that “extremists conveniently shift their method of jurisprudence to justify tactics that would normally be rejected by their strict constructivist reading of the religious texts and have reverted to an interpretive method that contravenes their literalist predispositions.”<sup>229</sup>

Bakr’s Islamic inspirations initially came from the Nation of Islam, whose doctrine promoted Black consciousness and superiority. Over time, however, Bakr and his followers acquired an appetite for *Salafism* (the original political and moral practice of Islam by its forefathers),<sup>230</sup> which, although it was marginal among the various schools of Islamic jurisprudence in Trinidad and Tobago, nonetheless was present. The philosophy permeated the *ummah* through the interaction of Trinidadian Muslim scholars, who had benefited from scholarships in Saudi Arabia during the 1980s.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Hafez and Mullins, 967.

<sup>227</sup> Mahabir, “Allah’s Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago,” 64.

<sup>228</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, 17.

<sup>229</sup> Hafez, “Takfir and Violence against Muslims,” 42.

<sup>230</sup> Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, 184.

<sup>231</sup> McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends,” 272.

Additionally, the JAM's Salafist appetite was further elevated by the studying books and articles from the Egyptian writer Sayyid Qutb and other Salafi luminaries. The JAM was also obsessed with periodicals on the "Iranian Revolution and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, and had begun to identify with the Shia school of Islamic thought."<sup>232</sup> Sayyid Qutb represented a significant shift from revivalism (the second wave of Islamism) to radical Islamism (the third wave) and opened the floodgate for *takfir*.<sup>233</sup> Qutb wrote a book, *Milestone*, in which he was critical of the Western lifestyle and viewed it as conflicting with Islamic principles. To him, societies were dichotomous, with Muslims on one hand and apostates on the other. In this regard, he offered a vision for revolution against the latter.<sup>234</sup>

The JAM was ripe for religious radicalization due to the embedded tension within the *ummah*, which the perceived "Indianization of Islam," coupled with the revolutionary ideology, evoked. The ideology enabled Bakr to shape the minds of the members to appreciate that violence was necessary and justified against all that contradicted the mandate of the Qur'an.<sup>235</sup> He advocated for the return of Islam to the "golden age" and mandated that all Muslims stand as witnesses for God,<sup>236</sup> as the culture in Trinidad was in contravention with the Qur'an and the *sunnah*. This desire by the JAM could only be realized through the creation of an Islamic state based on the precepts and principles of the Qur'an. The rapid modernization of the country and its secular and celebratory disposition were all to the vexation of JAM and its Salafist belief.

### C. ETHNIC POLARIZATION

The discordant relationship between the Afro and Indo-Trinidadians appeared limited to the *ummah* until the advent of independence in the early 1960s. There were several political movements in which the two major ethnic groups worked amicably

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<sup>232</sup> Mahabir, "Allah's Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago," 64.

<sup>233</sup> Mahabir, 64.

<sup>234</sup> Mahabir, 64.

<sup>235</sup> Veldhuis and Staun, *Islamist Radicalization: A Root Cause Model*, 15.

<sup>236</sup> Mahabir, "Allah's Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago," 59.



together,<sup>237</sup> and they seemingly enjoyed ethnic harmony during the pre-independence era. However, the advent of independence triggered the creation of racially based political parties, which dominated the polls at national elections.<sup>238</sup> These fierce competitions among political parties naturally eroded the ethnic harmony that existed and made way for ethnic issues to spread.

Soon, ethnic dominance in government became endogenous to the political landscape. Furthermore, the political system inherited from the British by several Caribbean states, inclusive of Trinidad and Tobago, exacerbated the threat to the survival of opposition parties.<sup>239</sup> Inter-ethnic distrust became widespread, and ethnic identity and power became intertwined in party politics. Thus, the survival and well-being of each ethnic community rested upon their respective party in power.<sup>240</sup>

The lead-up to independence during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century coincided with the Cold War era when the politics of communism was slowly replaced with identity politics of ethnicity, religion, and gender to fill the vacated space of political ideology.<sup>241</sup> With its multiethnic population and the ambitions of politicians to leverage this ethnic heterogeneity, Trinidad and Tobago became predisposed to ethnic polarization. The Indo-Trinidadians were just approximately 35 percent of the total population, so it was necessary for the People's National Movement (PNM), which the Afro-Trinidadians had dominated, to leverage the race factor.<sup>242</sup> Issues related to ethnic inequality and repression by the PNM against the Indo-Trinidadians frequently surfaced. Nation-building and economic

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<sup>237</sup> Ferkiss and Ferkiss, "Race and Politics in Trinidad and Guyana," 5.

<sup>238</sup> Ferkiss and Ferkiss, 6.

<sup>239</sup> Ralph R. Premdas, "Ethnicity and Elections in the Caribbean: A Radical Realignment of Power in Trinidad and the Threat of Communal Strife" (The Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, 1996), 4, [https://kellogg.nd.edu/sites/default/files/old\\_files/documents/224\\_0.pdf](https://kellogg.nd.edu/sites/default/files/old_files/documents/224_0.pdf).

<sup>240</sup> Premdas, 7.

<sup>241</sup> Premdas, 3.

<sup>242</sup> Ferkiss and Ferkiss, "Race and Politics in Trinidad and Guyana," 6.

development programs were seen as benefiting one ethnic group. Inter-ethnic tension and the political divergence between the two major ethnic groups became obvious.<sup>243</sup>

The National Alliance for Reconstruction party (NAR), after putting an end to the 30-year reign of the PNM in 1986, was accused by Afro-Trinidadians as being too Indianized. They felt that Indo-Trinidadians held too many prominent cabinet positions and were uncomfortable with their representation.<sup>244</sup> The NAR became an elusive representation of a multiethnic party. After one year of governing, it went into turmoil, and the party was divided along ethnic lines. One faction was controlled by Basdeo Pandey (Indian faction) and the other (Black faction) by the then Prime Minister A.N.R. Robinson.<sup>245</sup> So, at the level of government, ethnic polarization was evident, adding to the entrenched rancor between the two major ethnic groups.

The complex ethnic polarization within Trinidad and Tobago is critical in unpacking the evolution of the JAM. The NAR did not find favor with the JAM, which emerged as an Afrocentric group during the period of Islamic discrimination. The seeming “Indianization” of the government added to the disenchantment of the JAM, and Bakr spared no effort to make known his resentful view of the then government. The extremism of Bakr and the JAM escalated to wanting to assassinate the then Prime Minister, A.N.R. Robinson.<sup>246</sup> According to McCoy and Knight, Bakr, under surveillance, remarked that “it was decreed by Allah that Muslims have to change the system. There is no other time to change but now.”<sup>247</sup> Bakr questioned the government’s legitimacy after the split and

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<sup>243</sup> Premdas, “Ethnicity and Elections in the Caribbean: A Radical Realignment of Power in Trinidad and the Threat of Communal Strife,” 10.

<sup>244</sup> McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends,” 276.

<sup>245</sup> Premdas, “Ethnicity and Elections in the Caribbean: A Radical Realignment of Power in Trinidad and the Threat of Communal Strife,” 10.

<sup>246</sup> Badri-Maharaj, “Globalization of the Jihadist Threat: Case Study of Trinidad and Tobago.”

<sup>247</sup> McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends,” 277.

argued that the government did not constitute a representation that the electorate had voted for in 1986.<sup>248</sup>

#### **D. ECONOMIC REPRESSION**

Abu Bakr capitalized on the prevailing economic conditions of Trinidad and Tobago to intensify the tension between the government and the Afro-Trinidadians, reinforcing the JAM's cause. The country, a socially and politically divided society, coupled with the economic contractions, added to the conditions fueling the JAM's radicalization. Statistical analysis finds a relationship between marginalized groups' experience and economic discrimination and violent extremism.<sup>249</sup>

After the discovery of hydrocarbon resources in the mid-1800s, commercial oil production began in 1902, and oil exportation became the key economic driver.<sup>250</sup> Boodhoo posits that "with the rapidly escalating oil prices after 1973, Trinidad's gross domestic product (GDP) doubled from TT \$4 billion in 1974 to \$8.9 billion by 1978."<sup>251</sup> Trinidad at that time was arguably the most affluent country in the Caribbean region. The bonanza of economic prosperity improved the quality of life of Trinidadians: salaries increased across all sectors; government welfare programs were drastically improved; and annual per capita income grew from US\$860 from the 1970s to a peak of US\$6,700 in 1984.<sup>252</sup>

Nonetheless, the decline in oil prices in the 1980s and the poor performance of the non-oil sectors severely decreased real output, which resulted in a rising cost of living and reduced wages. Per capita income fell to US\$3,600 at the time of the attempted coup.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Boodhoo, "Islamic Fundamentalism in the Caribbean (Dialogue #135)," 3.

<sup>249</sup> Hafez and Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism," 962.

<sup>250</sup> Fitzwilliam Stone Furness-Smith et al., "In a Nutshell: Oil and Gas Law in Trinidad and Tobago," Lexology, October 25, 2019, <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=b69237c4-512b-4dc2-b3e9-69157ff219f4>.

<sup>251</sup> Boodhoo, "Islamic Fundamentalism in the Caribbean (Dialogue #135)," 4.

<sup>252</sup> Boodhoo, 5.

<sup>253</sup> Boodhoo, 5.

The country gradually slid into a debtor nation status with the IMF, whose remedial structural program led to a reduction in government spending and import restrictions.<sup>254</sup> Unemployment was unacceptably high at a rate of 25 percent. The government economic recovery measures to absorb the impacts of a contracted economy severely affected the Black underclass.<sup>255</sup> Among the measures were reductions in state subsidies, a 10 percent pay cut, closure of some state enterprises, and the introduction of a 15 percent tax on consumable goods and services (Value Added Tax [VAT]).<sup>256</sup>

There was widespread public discontent with the government's austere economic policies. In some quarters, sentiments about the government's inability to address these fundamental economic problems were expressed. While these measures were meant to address the economic situation in the country at the time, the most vulnerable felt the impact, mainly the Afro-Trinidadians. The JAM embarked on social and welfare programs to ameliorate the scourges of economic repression in depressed and disadvantaged communities. McCoy and Knight opine that "based on the model established by groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, JAM developed an extensive network of social and welfare services in the communities in which it has a significant presence."<sup>257</sup>

The economic recession arguably created a window of opportunity to generate support from the wider society and accelerated the group's plan. Abu Bakr took advantage of the prevailing circumstances to garner public justification for the cause to overthrow the government; however, this turned out to be quite ill-founded as the JAM had little popular support from the wider society for their actions. They misjudged the atmosphere and mood of the people of Trinidad. The Commission registers that "Imam Abu Bakr made the false assumption that, because there was widespread discontent with the Government, he would automatically attract popular support for his actions from disaffected persons in the society

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<sup>254</sup> Boodhoo, 5.

<sup>255</sup> Mahabir, "Allah's Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago," 62.

<sup>256</sup> Boodhoo, "Islamic Fundamentalism in the Caribbean (Dialogue #135)," 4.

<sup>257</sup> McCoy and Knight, "Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends," 275.

including members of the Police Service, who had recently been publicly demonstrating against the Government.”<sup>258</sup>

## E. GRIEVANCES

While there is no causal relationship between grievances and radicalization, in this case, grievances like economic repression created an environment conducive for radicalization. Hafez and Mullins observe that “[grievance is viewed] as the landscape that frames the proximate causes of radicalization, but we do not find compelling any argument that suggests that they are directly causal of behavioral radicalization.”<sup>259</sup> Any action or non-action that serves or is interpreted to alienate, marginalize, or is prejudicial to a group could effectively provoke grievances.

Researchers on Islamist radicalization often point out that one of the factors that precipitates violent extremism is grievance, which Hafez and Mullins indicate entails “personal disaffection, loss, cultural alienation, or a crisis that leads one to seek a new path in life.”<sup>260</sup> In the case of the JAM, the praxis of “Indianization of Islam” elicited grievance, which became embedded within the JAM’s structure. This grievance prompted Bakr to restore Afro-Trinidadians to their authentic identity as Muslims, as Christianity was deemed an imposition by the colonial masters on enslaved Black people—a claim several historians have rejected.<sup>261</sup>

Several factors provoked grievances on the part of the JAM. First was the Indianization of Islam, which was primarily responsible for the emergence of the JAM as it was difficult for Muslims of Afro-Trinidadian descent to assimilate seamlessly within the *ummah*. Second were the effects of the economic recovery measures, which impacted the Black underclass. The downturn of the economy in the 1980s contributed to the PNM loss at the 1986 elections. The party was accused of extending opportunities to Indo-

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<sup>258</sup> “Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the 1990 Attempted Coup d’état,”

<sup>259</sup> Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism.”

<sup>260</sup> Hafez and Mullins, 961.

<sup>261</sup> Mahabir, “Allah’s Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago,” 64.

Trinidadians in the middle of the economic crisis. McCoy and Knight contend that “in 1990 the perception that economic interests and political elites continued to marginalize Afro-Trinidadians and Tobagonians while favoring those of Indian descent was a primary grievance.”<sup>262</sup>

The third was the unresolved dispute over the property at No.1 Mucurapo Road, which the JAM had developed. The property was first occupied in 1969 by the Islamic Missionaries Guild (IMG), a group of non-nationals, with the government’s permission. The occupation by the IMG was shrouded in controversy as the group did not represent the entire Muslim community, and consequently, they vacated the property. Abu Bakr returned to Trinidad in 1978 and occupied the property, claiming that it rightfully belonged to Muslims. The Commission of Enquiry details that “[Imam Bakr] sought the IMG’s permission and they acceded to his request.”<sup>263</sup> The Commission found that the initial permission by the government for the IMG to occupy was an error in law. The property was owned by the City Council of Port of Spain.<sup>264</sup> Being unaware of this fact, the JAM began a series of construction projects in 1984 on the property, which encroached on the State sewage system.<sup>265</sup>

The land dispute lasted for over ten years without a definite decision. The City Council began to send notices to the JAM for cessation of construction and repossession. However, Bakr ignored the warnings of the city and continued constructing a mosque and several other buildings.<sup>266</sup> The government instructed the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force to establish outposts near the site to prevent further encroachment on State property.<sup>267</sup> The Commission recorded the government’s effort to resolve the issue by

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<sup>262</sup> McCoy and Knight, “Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends.”

<sup>263</sup> Sommons et al., “Report of the Commission of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into the Events Surrounding the Attempted Coup D’état of 27th July 1990.”

<sup>264</sup> Sommons et al., 78.

<sup>265</sup> Sommons et al., 508.

<sup>266</sup> Mahabir, “Allah’s Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago,” 67.

<sup>267</sup> Sommons et al., “Report of the Commission of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into the Events Surrounding the Attempted Coup D’état of 27th July 1990,” 82.

offering the JAM ten acres of land at another location that Bakr rejected.<sup>268</sup> He filed a legal challenge against the City Council, which the court dismissed on July 23 1990. Abu Bakr and the JAM took the dismissal of the case to mean that the buildings and the mosque, which they held sacred, would be demolished.<sup>269</sup> The coup was carried out just four days after. The decision by the court, even though seemingly within the frame of the law, was viewed as anti-Islamic by the JAM.

Additionally, the request by Bakr for a judicial review of the decisions to establish military outposts to overlook the JAM's compound was dismissed and exacerbated the tension. The Commission found that the military presence next to the community annoyed the JAM. Hafez and Mullins point out that "as Muslims and their communities become the objects of suspicion and surveillance, the sense of humiliation deepens."<sup>270</sup>

## F. CONCLUSION

The radicalization process of the JAM did not happen overnight. It was gradual with the aforementioned factors as enablers—starting with the "Indianization of Islam." As other factors unfolded, the radicalization of the JAM intensified, as shown in Figure 4. The effects of the ethnic polarization and the economic repression allowed the radical ideology to fester by creating the conditions for the JAM to be more aggrieved. These factors provided a sense of justification for Bakr and the JAM to take matters into their own hands. Bakr felt that the system was shrouded in darkness and that it needed to be changed to reflect Allah's mandate.<sup>271</sup>

The legal battle over the sprawling compound at No. 1 Mucurapo Road, which housed schools, a mosque, housing quarters, and other facilities, was the straw that broke the camel's back. From the examined records of the conversations between Bakr and Abdullah Bilaal (the leader of the assault on the parliament), the JAM had a very strong

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<sup>268</sup> Sommons et al., 519.

<sup>269</sup> Mahabir, "Allah's Outlaws: The Jamaat al Muslimeen of Trinidad and Tobago," 69.

<sup>270</sup> Hafez and Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism."

<sup>271</sup> McCoy and Knight, "Homegrown Violent Extremism in Trinidad and Tobago: Local Patterns, Global Trends," 277.

attachment to the compound in question. The JAM felt passionate about this property and was willing to defend it at all costs. The Commission concluded that “[the JAM] would have defended any attempt forcibly to divest them of the lands with their lives and were prepared to wage a Jihad in defense of the lands.”<sup>272</sup> Bakr viewed the dismissal of his legal application by the court and the instruction to demolish the mosque and the other buildings on the property as an attack on Islam, which he needed to resist violently. Yet the attack was not totally in response to the judicial ruling for the confiscation of the property. Rather, the JAM used it as a means to increase its leverage for support within the *ummah* and the wider society, which all turned out to be counterintuitive and ill-founded.

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<sup>272</sup> Sommons et al., “Report of the Commission of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into the Events Surrounding the Attempted Coup D’état of 27th July 1990,” 91.



## V. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Guyana's susceptibility to violent extremism remains a concern and necessitates appropriate actions by the policymakers and other stakeholders to prevent the emergence of such groups and the violence associated with them. The recent discovery of hydrocarbon resources in Guyana and the subsequent development of the oil and gas industry bring the country even closer to Trinidad and Tobago's experience. Therefore, greater attention is warranted, especially now that the industry is added to the matrix of threat factors.

### A. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following strategies and recommendations are not exhaustive. They provide a framework through which policymakers in Guyana can craft initiatives to disarm the violent extremism process and suppress the potential threats which emanate from those factors examined in Chapter IV. The strategies and recommendations come in order of ease and simplicity for policymakers to implement.

#### 1. Strategy One: Invest in Youth Empowerment Programs

No one is born a violent extremist—he or she is made or nurtured to be one. Therefore, suppressing the process of radicalization through education and youth empowerment programs and by offering positive alternatives is one promising approach. This strategy empowers young people with resilience, fosters a positive sense of identity, and enables them to become “global citizens.”<sup>273</sup> Youth empowerment programs could stimulate a sense of purpose and reduce a young person's tendency to gravitate to violent groups. In 2018, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) saw it necessary to launch a joint project—Prevention of Violent Extremism Through Youth Empowerment—in the Middle East to empower youths, under the theme, *#Youth 4 Peace*.<sup>274</sup> Hundreds of youths benefited from

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<sup>273</sup> UNESCO, “Preventing Violent Extremism,” Preventing Violent Extremism, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, February 26, 2016, <https://en.unesco.org/preventingviolentextremism>.

<sup>274</sup> UNESCO.

the program through capacity development training and workshops. These international organizations continue to provide the necessary training for young people to lead the global movement toward a peaceful world.

Youth empowerment programs are easy to implement and could be incorporated in religious, social and educational institutions. Prevention of violent extremism yields more results than countering it. The former is less destructive and requires fewer resources and effort. On the other hand, the latter costs lives and requires resources that could have otherwise been utilized.

## **2. Strategy Two: Observe and Celebrate of All Cultural Identities**

Guyana's current policy of observance and celebration of all religious cultures should be sustained at all costs. Promoting cultural diversity fosters a more inclusive and peaceful society. Cross-cultural learning gives individuals more perspectives and alternative frames through which to see the world. The community must continue to learn and be encouraged to tolerate other groups' cultures, irrespective of how these cultures cut across theirs. Guyanese have a history of religious tolerance. For instance, some religious holidays are celebrated by a large segment of the population irrespective of their religion—some Hindus and Muslims participate in Christmas celebrations, while some Christians participate in the Hindu *Phagwah* celebration for the fun associated with it and not for the religious significance.

In Guyana, the cultures of the three central religions make up part of the school's curriculum. Regardless of the denomination to which a student belongs, he or she is taught about these different cultures. The major observances of each are codified in law as national holidays. This tradition of cultural tolerance in Guyana could aid in disarming the process of radicalization and contributing to a more peaceful and harmonious society.

## **3. Strategy Three: Increase the Capacity of the Intelligence Services**

A robust and structured intelligence system would be able to detect in advance the planning of violent attacks and aid in their disruption. The intelligence agency in Trinidad was aware of the planning efforts of the JAM but failed to take appropriate action. The secretive nature of Guyana's intelligence services and the unavailability of literature preclude the

researcher from evaluating these services adequately. I cannot speak to its state of readiness for incidents of this nature (i.e., violent extremism). Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the intelligence services in Guyana have undergone profound shifts in their organization, purpose, equipment, and doctrine since the 1990 violent attack on the government of Trinidad and Tobago. The government of Guyana should make every effort, therefore, to ensure capacity building and innovation of the intelligence system to detect the emergence of these violent threats.

#### **4. Strategy Four: Manage Transparently the Oil-Resource Revenues**

Guyana's significant hydrocarbon discovery and its expectations of becoming a very wealthy country predispose it to the scourges indicated by Ross. For many developing countries, having oil resources is a curse rather than a blessing.<sup>275</sup> Pre-1992, violence in oil-producing countries account for a fifth of the world's civil conflicts, both large and small conflicts; however, post-1992, that number has increased to a third, and these conflicts are expected to increase as high crude prices attract more countries into the industry.<sup>276</sup> Guyana could overcome these adverse effects by instituting transparent management of oil resources and revenues through the following three actions.

##### ***a. Remain a Member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)***

The preparation and publication of reports from the EITI provide complete disclosure of states' income from the extractive sector and all material payments made to the government by companies operating in this sector. The EITI, although not binding, promotes open and accountable management of natural resources, strengthens government and company systems, informs public debates, and enhances trust.<sup>277</sup> It encourages mining companies to "publish what they pay" and governments to "disclose what they receive."<sup>278</sup> The initiative allows

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<sup>275</sup> Desiree Nestor, "The Oil Discovery in Guyana and Plans for the Future," *The Borgen Project* (blog), September 11, 2019, <https://borgenproject.org/the-oil-discovery-in-guyana-and-plans-for-the-future/>.

<sup>276</sup> Ross, "Blood Barrels: Why Oil Wealth Fuels Conflicts," 1.

<sup>277</sup> Ross, 3.

<sup>278</sup> Ross, 3.

even members of the general public to see how the government uses the revenues from these resources.

The EITI was first announced at the Earth Summit in Johannesburg in 2002 and was officially launched in London in 2003.<sup>279</sup> In May 2010, Guyana expressed interest, and in May 2012, officially joined the EITI. In December 2015, the government of Guyana made a public statement of its commitment to the initiative, and two years after, the Guyana EITI multi-stakeholder group (MSG) was formed and headquartered at the Ministry of Natural Resources. Since establishing this body, Guyana has prepared two public reports: the Fiscal Report for 2017 (in 2019) and Fiscal Report for 2018 (in 2021).<sup>280</sup> This initiative could reduce suspicions of corruption and mismanagement of oil revenues, all of which quickly feed into the process of violent extremism.

***b. Enact the Natural Resources Charter***

The “natural resource charter” is a set of guidelines and principles enshrined in law on how to best manage natural resource wealth. Another way Guyana can transparently manage oil resources and revenues is by enacting this charter. Paul Collier, a renowned economist, is the progenitor of this initiative. In his book, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*, he posits that the charter would establish international standards for the transparent management of natural-resource revenues.<sup>281</sup> This strategy is a good fit in guiding developing countries with natural resource endowments. Collier examined the chain of events from the extraction of the resource to public expenditure, highlighted areas where transactions went wrong in East Timor and was convinced that a charter would have been valuable and made a huge difference. The empirical evidence shows the value of the charter in avoiding mismanagement of oil resource revenues and Guyana should make every effort to enact this charter.

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<sup>279</sup> Guyana Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, *Guyana Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative Report for Fiscal Year 2018* (Guyana: Guyana Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 2021), 8, <https://eiti.org/files/documents/gyeiti-report-fy-2018.pdf>.

<sup>280</sup> Guyana Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 8.

<sup>281</sup> Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*.

*c. Manage Revenue Flow*

The volatility of oil prices requires robust management of oil-revenue flow to avoid misdirection of oil revenues. Making the economy less sensitive to a bust in oil prices should be the principal objective in managing the oil-revenue flow. Although the government of Guyana emulated Norway and established a “Natural Resource Sovereign Fund” as an added layer for transparency and to reduce the effects of a drastic fall in oil prices, government leaders should make every effort to diversify to reduce the economic sensitivity to the changing oil prices. Some of the revenues should be used to invest other sectors that can cushion the economy, should the oil price plummet.

**5. Strategy Five: Invest in Welfare Programs**

A robust welfare program reduces the impact of economic repression, poverty, and income inequality. Several studies have shown that countries with more generous welfare programs are less vulnerable to violent extremism.<sup>282</sup> Although scholars are divided over their causal relationship with violent extremism, these factors make the environment conducive and ripe for the threats of violent extremism. Some of the revenues from the oil and gas bonanza Guyana will soon be enjoying could be used for welfare programs to cushion the impacts of economic insecurity, reduce poverty, and bridge the income inequality gaps.

In the case of the JAM, weak welfare policies drove adherents to join the group as a way out of a disadvantaged situation. Burgoon in “On Welfare and Terror: Social Welfare Policies and Political-Economic Roots of Terrorism” indicates that reducing inequality and poverty and addressing socioeconomic insecurity, diminishes the enticement to commit violent extremism.<sup>283</sup> He uses the diagram in Figure 5 to show the connection between welfare programs and their effects on individuals’ preference for violent extremism. The diagram shows a negative correlation between welfare policies and choice for terror, except in one area where it builds capacity for terror.

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<sup>282</sup> Brian Burgoon, “On Welfare and Terror: Social Welfare Policies and Political-Economic Roots of Terrorism,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 2 (2006): 176, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27638483>.

<sup>283</sup> Burgoon, 177.

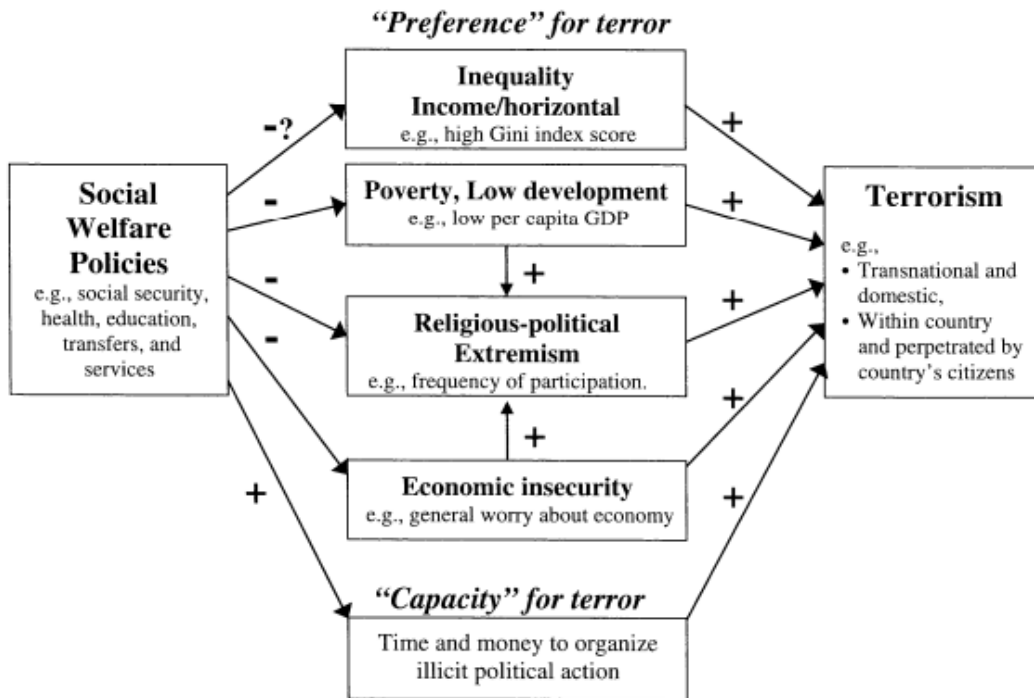


Figure 5. Social welfare policies and the preferences and capacities for violent extremism and terrorism<sup>284</sup>

## 6. Strategy Six: Promote Central Government Support for Local Government

A local government system cuts across several societal cleavages. It involves bequeathing of authority and financial resources through “deconcentration, delegation, and devolution”—from the central government to the regional level of administration.<sup>285</sup> Local government is one of the few systems of governance that could rally resources and the rural population for political and socioeconomic development.

Guyana’s current political system (Westminster or majoritarian) affects the overall sociopolitical stability of the country due to the one-party dominance in public affairs. A

<sup>284</sup> Burgoon, 179.

<sup>285</sup> Srinivas Ganapathiraju and Robert Miske, “Decentralizing Democracy: A Governance Proposal for Post-Conflict Ethnically Divided Countries” (Master’s Thesis, Monterey, Naval Postgraduate School, 2012), 25, [https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/27834/12Dec\\_Ganapathiraju\\_Miske.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/27834/12Dec_Ganapathiraju_Miske.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y).

decentralized governance (local government) framework offers a more viable option to reduce the monopoly of political power at the central government level.<sup>286</sup> A local government structure has been studied as the recommended fit for countries that are conflict-prone and ethnically divided. The dissatisfaction among the people could be minimized through the implementation of such structures by the central government.

The dominant characteristics of local government—self-governance and autonomy<sup>287</sup>—can contribute to enhanced accountability, reduction in political rancor, and above all, social and ethnic harmony. This autonomy ensures public goods and services are tailored to meet the needs of the people in a specific locale.<sup>288</sup> This decentralization of governance also ensures the curbing of state authoritarian tendencies by diffusing power at the central government level<sup>289</sup> and enables early detection of potential threats by social groups, given the local governments' closer interaction with the people.

## **7. Strategy Seven: Embrace a Power-Sharing Model of Governance**

Consociationalism, another word for power-sharing, is undoubtedly one of the better systems to bring about social and ethnic cohesion in fragmented and plural societies. It is arguably the best model for governance over an ethnically heterogeneous community and allows for participation in the political decision-making processes by the representatives of all significant groups.<sup>290</sup> Several countries (Austria, Colombia, Cyprus, India, Lebanon, Malaysia, the Netherlands, and Switzerland)<sup>291</sup> which were predisposed to violence due to their deep religious and ethnolinguistic cleavages, implemented this system of governance successfully. The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 between the British government and the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland was another excellent

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<sup>286</sup> Ganapathiraju and Miske, 7.

<sup>287</sup> Department of Public Information, "Guyana Department of Public Information," *Know Your Local Government* (blog), August 3, 2018, <https://dpi.gov.gy/know-your-local-government/>.

<sup>288</sup> Department of Public Information.

<sup>289</sup> Ganapathiraju and Miske, "Decentralizing Democracy," 31.

<sup>290</sup> David Hinds, "Ethnicity and the Elusive Quest for Power Sharing in Guyana," *Ethnopolitics* 9, no. 3–4 (November 1, 2010): 335, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2010.481971>.

<sup>291</sup> Ganapathiraju and Miske, "Decentralizing Democracy," 21.

example of the efficacy of power-sharing, which brought closure to the Northern Ireland War (1967-1998). Article 13 of the Constitution of Guyana provides for inclusivity in the decision-making process of the state. However, this article remains an unfulfilled mandate.

Inclusivity is integral in a political framework and constitutes an essential characteristic of a democratic process. Kanchan Chandra and Omar Garcia-Ponce investigated the Maoist rebellion in India to determine why some regions were affected by Maoist violence and others were not. They surmised that “the stronger the presence of subaltern-led political parties in a district at this juncture, the lower the likelihood of experiencing chronic armed violence subsequently.”<sup>292</sup> The more involved the uneducated caste (Subaltern) in public affairs, the less likely that particular region was affected by Maoist violence. Similarly, the more involved political parties get in public affairs decision-making, the less likely ethnic discontent would emerge in Guyana.

## **B. CONCLUSION**

The research concludes that the radicalization of the JAM did not happen overnight. Instead, it was a gradual process, which festered over ten years before the JAM evolved into a violent extremist group. The research also unpacks the combination of factors that led to the radicalization and evolution of the group. The emergence of the JAM was impacted by the “Indianization of Islam,” where the mainstream Muslims within the *ummah* saw the Afro-Trinidadians as an imitation of Indo-Trinidadians’ faith and culture.<sup>293</sup> This mindset made it difficult for the Afro-Muslims to assimilate with ease in the *ummah* and necessitated the formation of the JAM.

As the factors unfolded, the radicalization of the group intensified and evolved ultimately into violent extremism. The research unearths that the court’s decision to confiscate the JAM’s compound at No. 1 Mucurapo Road was the straw that broke the camel’s back and was viewed by the group as an attack on Islam. Bakr deemed it necessary

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<sup>292</sup> Kanchan Chandra and Omar García-Ponce, “Why Ethnic Subaltern-Led Parties Crowd Out Armed Organizations: Explaining Maoist Violence in India,” *World Politics* 71, no. 2 (April 2019): 368, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S004388711800028X>.

<sup>293</sup> Figueira, *Jihad in Trinidad and Tobago*.



to resist this attack. This decision catapulted him and the JAM to project violence against the government. In so doing, unbeknownst to the general public and the Trinidadian authority, Bakr and the JAM carried out an unprecedented and deadly attack in an attempt to overthrow the government of Trinidad and Tobago on July 27, 1990. This attack cost the lives of 24 persons,<sup>294</sup> including a member of parliament,<sup>295</sup> several police officers, and injury to many.

The attack impacted the entire Caribbean region and the Western hemisphere and forced policymakers to review their respective public security strategies. Now that the oil and gas industry has been added to the matrix of factors in Guyana, it necessitates a review of the country's public security policy and defense strategies to neutralize the process of radicalization and violent extremism. Active consideration of the recommendations proffered would certainly provide policymakers with a frame to suppress the emergence of violent extremism.

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<sup>294</sup> Sir. David Sommons et al., "Report of the Commission of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into the Events Surrounding the Attempted Coup D'état of July 27 1990," 2014, 975.

<sup>295</sup> Sommons et al., 344.

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