This collaborative presentation (with equal contribution) was delivered at the Edge Hill Corpus Research Group on 14 December 2023.

A PACK OF LONE WOLVES?
EXPLORING THE NEXUS BETWEEN THE LONE-WOLF TERRORIST, AL-QAEDA, AND ISIS IN THE BRITISH PRESS

Daniel Malone & Hanna Schmück

Lancaster University | Edge Hill University

ABSTRACT

Historically, the lone wolf has been associated with different movements, ranging from the propaganda of the deed in the 19th Century to the leaderless resistance of white-supremacist groups in the 1980s and 90s. More recently, it is within the domain of Islamist terrorism, often dominated by Al-Qaeda and ISIS, where the lone wolf has become increasingly associated, especially in the British press.

In this joint presentation, we discuss the analytical approaches and results from our analysis of discourses surrounding the lone-wolf terrorist, al Qaeda, and ISIS in three diachronic subcorpora of the Lone Wolf Corpus (Malone, 2020), a compilation of British Press articles from 2000 to 2019. In a unique methodological combination, we employed large-scale collocation networks and topical clustering to examine shifting discourses through collocational clusters and applied a corpus-based critical discourse analysis to examine representations of the Al-Qaeda-ISIS nexus.

Hanna introduces the methodology employed to generate topical clusters and discusses collocational changes and constants in emerging discourses surrounding the lone-wolf terrorist. The resulting patterns present a discursive shift from clusters related to causative factors (e.g., a mental health subcluster), towards the internationalisation and institutionalisation of lone-wolf terrorism, and finally to response management in the form of sentencing and punitive actions (e.g., a court proceedings/prison subcluster).

Reporting on his corpus-based critical discourse analysis, Daniel presents the emergent representations surrounding co-occurrences of the node AL QAEDA with ISIS. These discourses were categorised into four modes of representation of presented relationship-types: Convergence, Association, Dissociation, and Divergence. These modes contributed to surrounding (in)security discourses that at times equate, promote and/or relegate different entities in a continual reshuffling of the threat hierarchy; a process termed here *enmity reimagining*.

AGENDA

- Introduction – Discourses of (In)Security and Threat Representation
- The Lone Wolf Corpus
- Part I: Collocational Clusters
  - Large Linguistic Networks
  - The LLN pipeline
  - Analysis of Collocational Clusters
  - Conclusion

- Part II: Corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)
  - Emerging Al Qaeda-ISIS Nexus Types
  - Interaction of (In)Security Discourses
  - Enmity Reimagining
  - Conclusion

NAVIGATING DISCOURSES OF (IN)SECURITY

Dichotomy of (In)Security Discourses: Inseparable yet conflicting perceptions of security and insecurity.

> "Because we can never think security without insecurity, and vice versa, there is an essential conflict, which the word itself bears within itself, at the heart of security that is overlooked by the traditional study of security. [...] any discourse of security must always already, simultaneously and in a plurality of ways, be a discourse of danger too." (Dillon 1996)

From a Constructivist perspective, macro-level (in)security

- is not as an *a priori* reality, but rather a result of the processes of *threat representation*.

- discourses not only reflect but reify perceptions of threat.

The critical examination of (In)Security Discourses

- critiques 'natural' security paradigms and their formation.

- challenges the subjectivity of security paradigms, their underpinning practices/processes, and the role/purpose of threat identification.
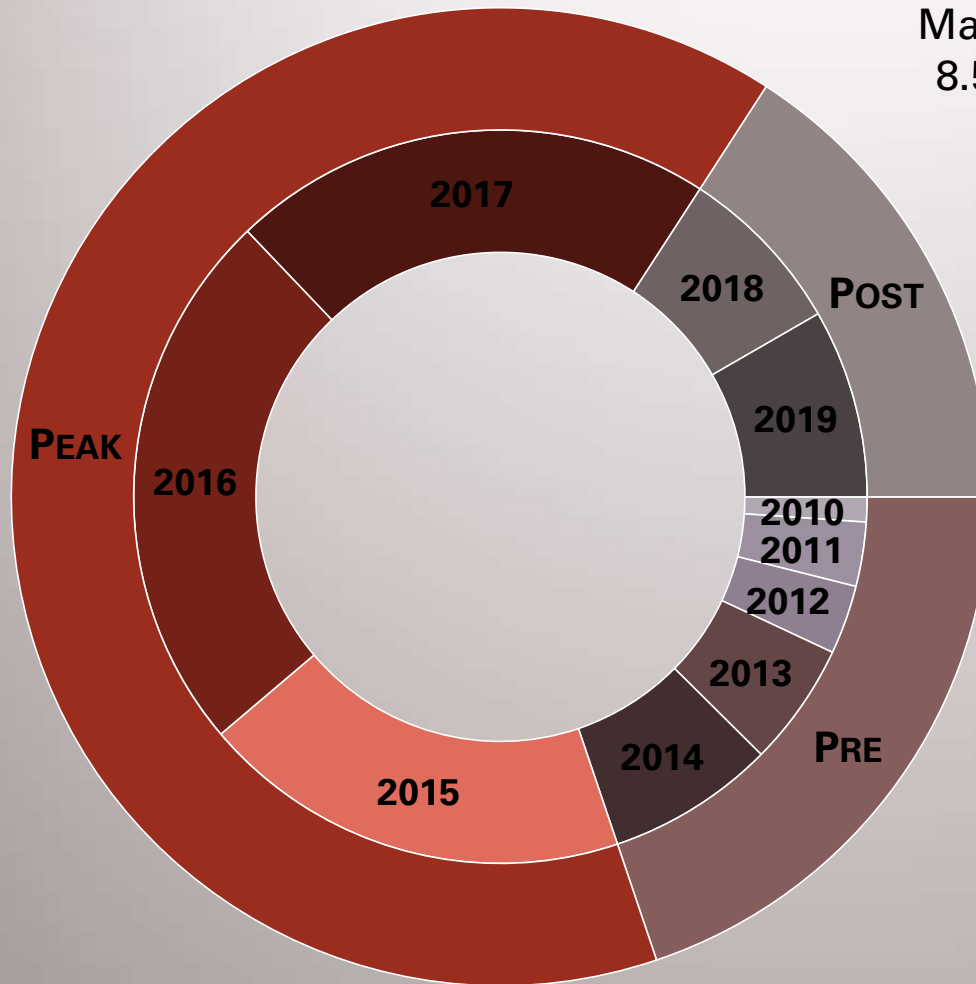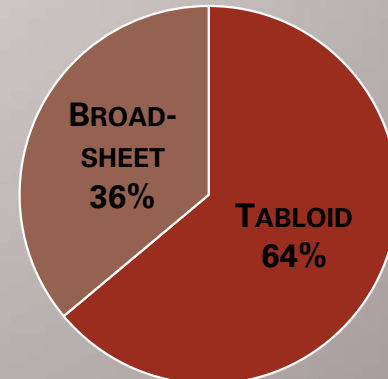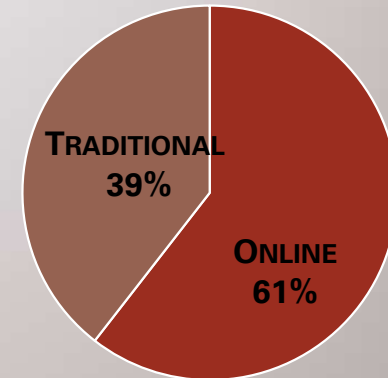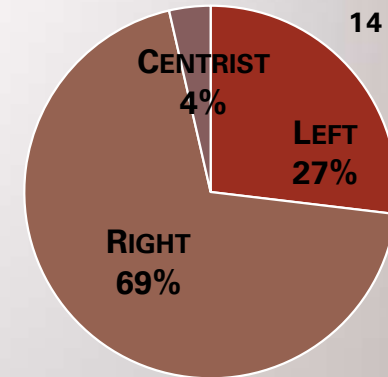
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PART I
COLLOCATIONAL CLUSTERS

LARGE LINGUISTIC NETWORKS

General idea: bridging the gap between **corpus linguistics** and **graph theory**

Graph theory (Gross et al., 2019) is a branch of mathematics focusing on nodes (points) connected by edges (lines) and their properties

LLNs can be generated on different linguistic data, here we focus on corpus-wide **collocations**

Collocation broadly defined as 'a repeated or commonly co-occurring set of words' (Stulpinaitė et al., 2016; Brezina, 2018)

# **L**ARGE **L**INGUISTIC **N**ETWORKS

Aim	Key feature

• A better representation of collocational profiles and thus **special functions** (Pecina, 2010), **semantic relations** (Xiao & McEnery, 2006), **aboutness** (Phillips, 1989), and **discursive contexts** (Brezina, 2016; Baker, 2016; Brezina et al., 2015) of words	• Holistic exploration of the corpus
	    • generating *all* collocations
	    • analysing corpus-wide features
	    • exploring individual words with special collocational functions
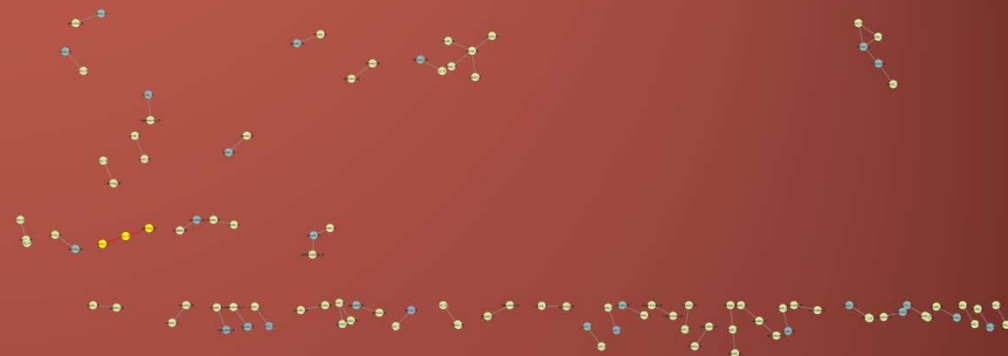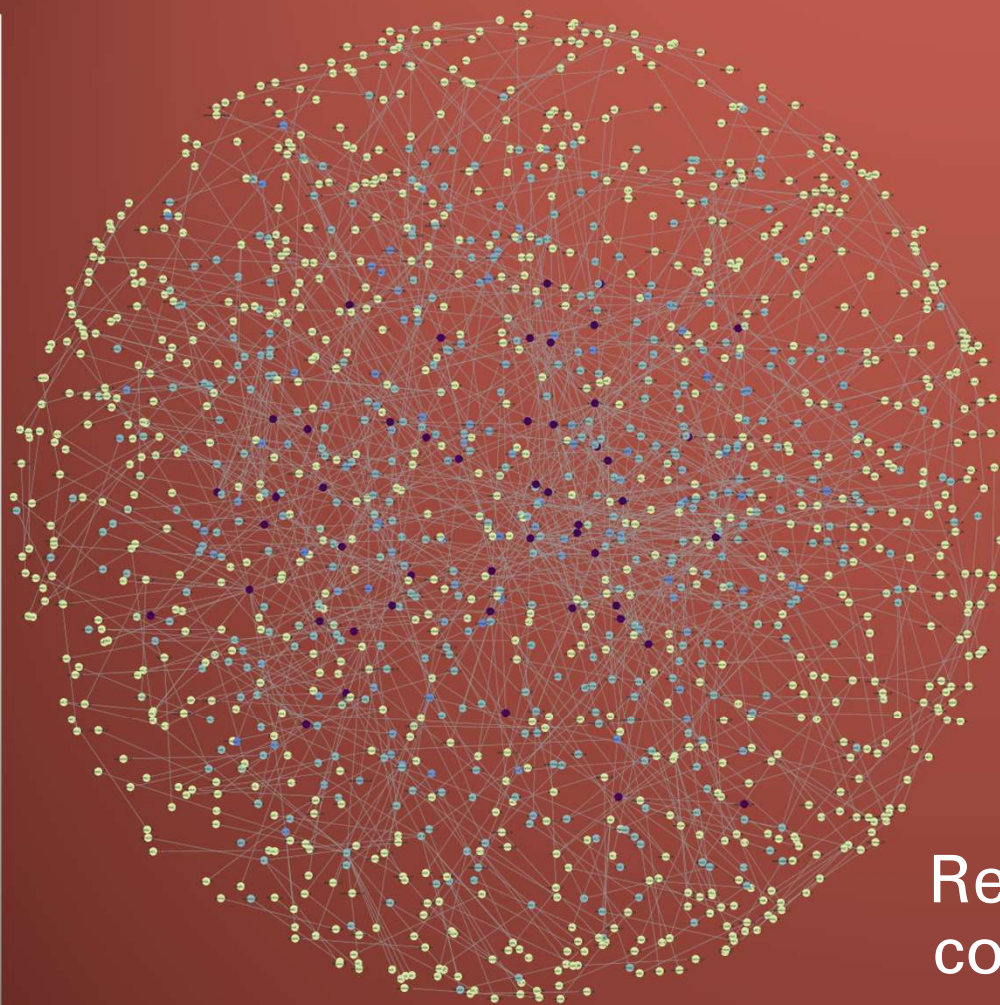
Representation of the corpus-wide collocation networks based on the unclustered pre-peak corpus.

THE PIPELINE

A pack of lone wolves

lone_wolf_bigrams_script.ipynb

Lone Wolf Networks

This ipynb documents the procedure used to generate collocation networks for the lone wolf project. In line with existing key word analyses, MI scores and log likelihood of bigrams have been extracted from a diachronic corpus on lone wolf discourses in the British Press. Years have been grouped into pre-peak, peak, and post-peak (see classification below).

Key information regarding the bigram generation:

- bigrams cannot span multiple sentences

- Filters and thresholds are fully customisable, to keep collocation networks at a manageable size and to mirror ANON's previous work a minimum LL score of 50 had been implemented

```python
In [1]:  from matplotlib.ticker import FuncFormatter
         import os
         import re
         import random
         import pickle
         import pandas as pd
         import numpy as np
         from collections import Counter
```

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Raw Corpus → Normalise ISIS/AlQaeda spelling → lemmatisation and POS tagging (spaCy) → generating global frequency wordlist / generating frequency wordlist per year

generating global frequency wordlist → generating sentence-wide tuples (directional) → removing non-alphanumeric words/tuples → filtering for most lexical* items (J,R,N,V) → combining into one dataframe containing all subcorpora

combining into one dataframe containing all subcorpora → (optional) applying minimum collocation frequencies → contingency table creation → AM calculation → csv file for network generation / calculation of percentage overlap per subcorpus
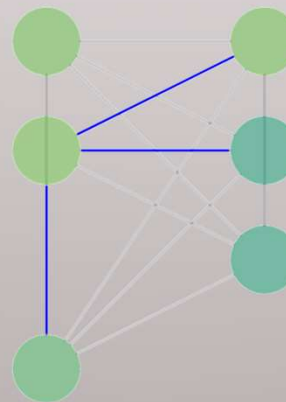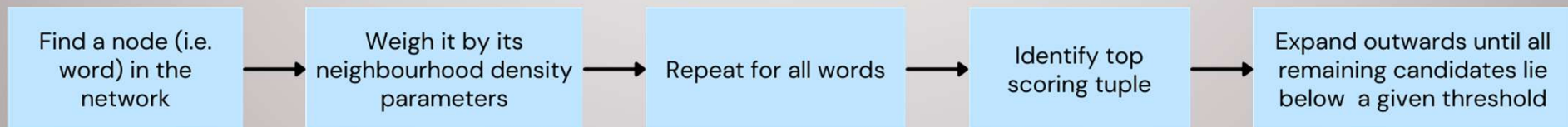
METHODOLOGY

LLN Collocation analysis

- Selection of relevant layer(s) of analysis
  - here: lemma_POS, AM: logLikelihood > 50, sentence-span

- Selection of relevant properties
  - here: density, centrality, cluster memberships

- Selection of clustering algorithm
  - here: MCODE clustering (Bader & Hogue, 2003)

- Selection of appropriate layout
  - here: edge-weighted spring directed layout (Kamada & Kawai, 1989) based on AM strength

CLUSTERING

- Here MCODE clustering (Bader & Hogue, 2003)

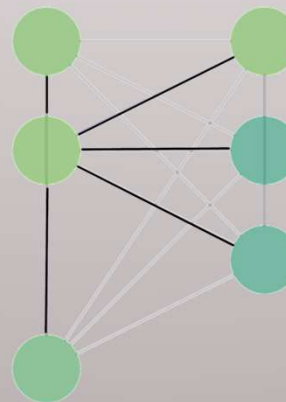- In simple terms, the clustering algorithm follows these steps:

| Find a node (i.e. word) in the network | → | Weigh it by its neighbourhood density parameters | → | Repeat for all words | → | Identify top scoring tuple | → | Expand outwards until all remaining candidates lie below a given threshold |

3 actual connections

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CLUSTERING

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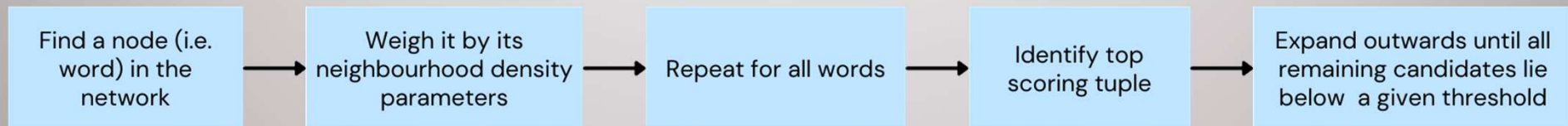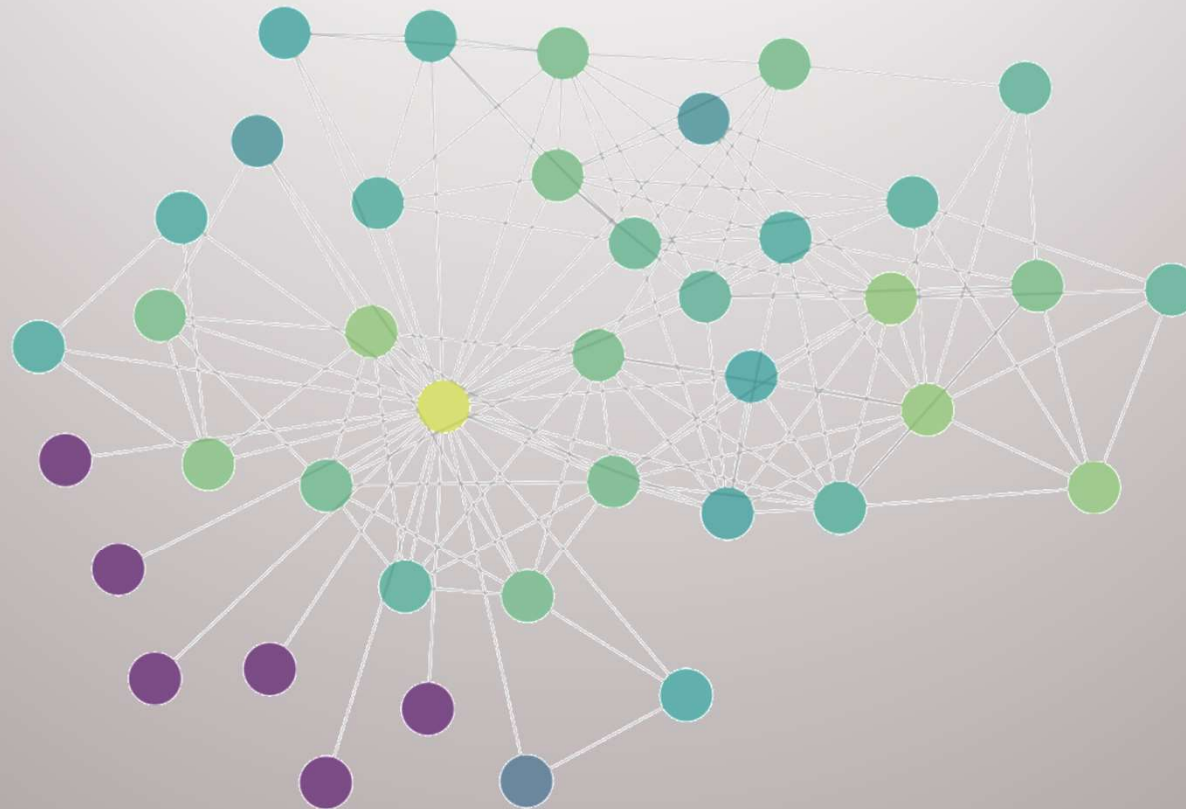| Find a node (i.e. word) in the network | → | Weigh it by its neighbourhood density parameters | → | Repeat for all words | → | Identify top scoring tuple | → | Expand outwards until all remaining candidates lie below a given threshold |

5 possible connections

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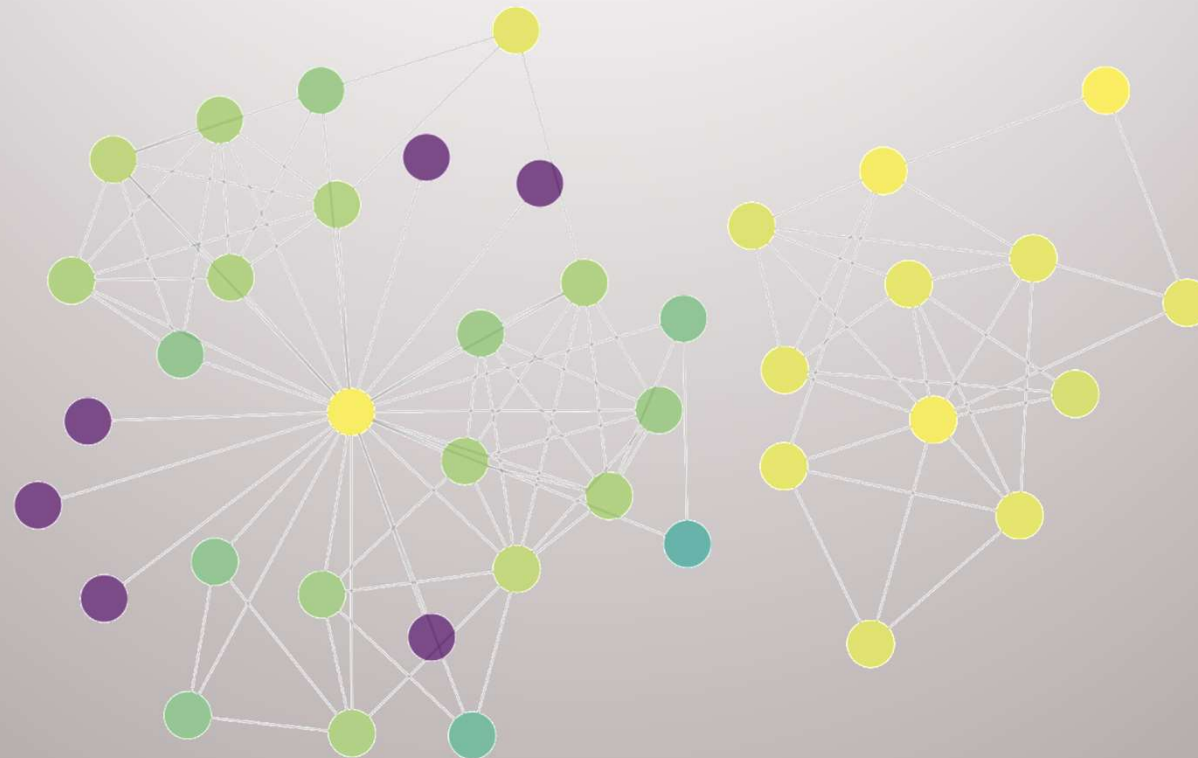
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CLUSTERING

LWC NETWORK PROPERTIES

	PREPEAK	PEAK	POSTPEAK
Number of nodes	6,538	13,264	5,387
Number of edges	7,184	20,695	5,741
Avg. number of neighbours	2.2	3.1	2.1
Network diameter	27	22	29
Characteristic path length	9.4	6.8	9.5
Clustering coefficient	0.006	0.01	0.007
Connected components	1,068	1,473	866
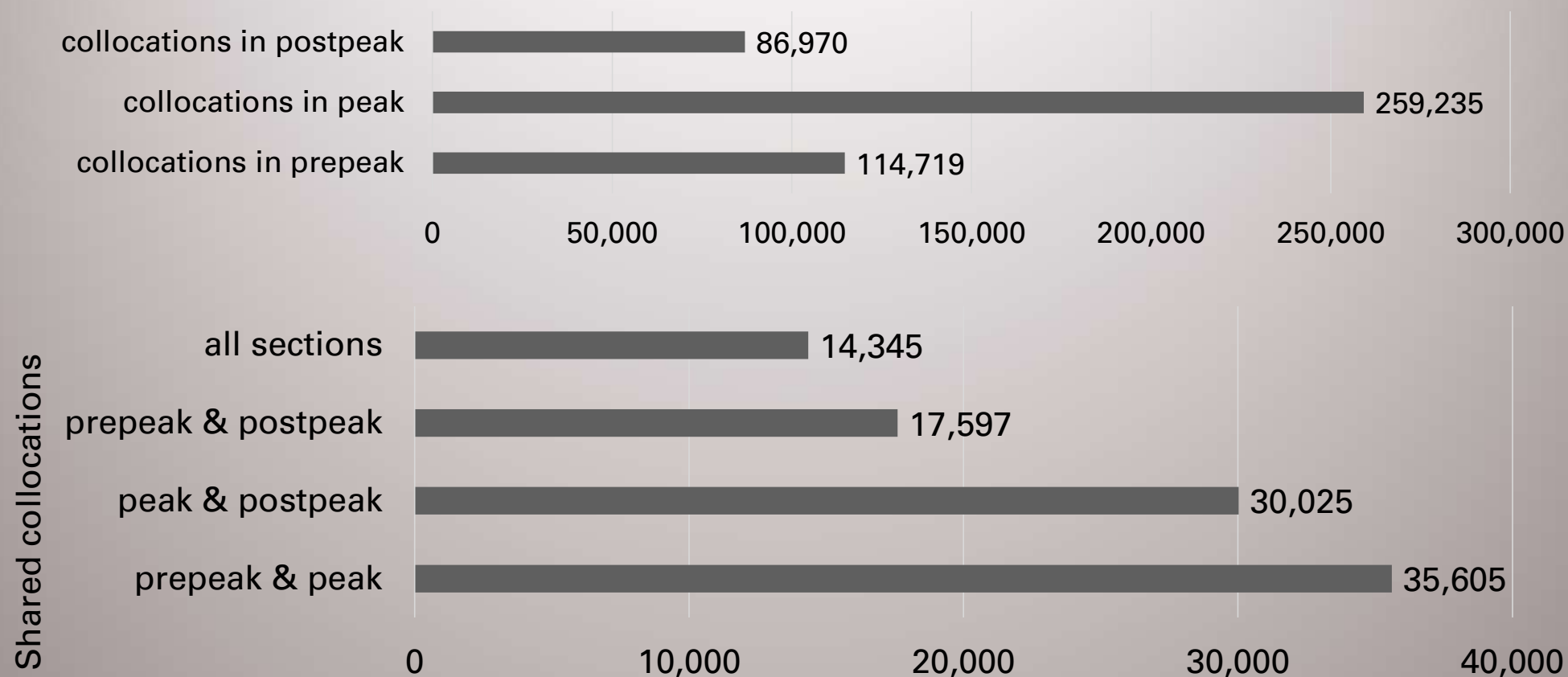
PREPEAK
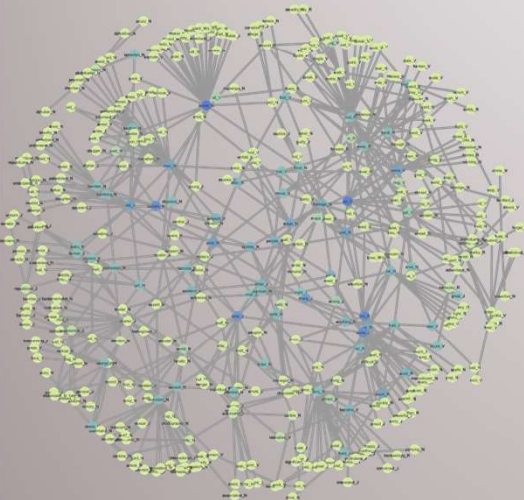
TERRORISM & HOSTAGES & ISLAM & BOMB & GRAMMAR
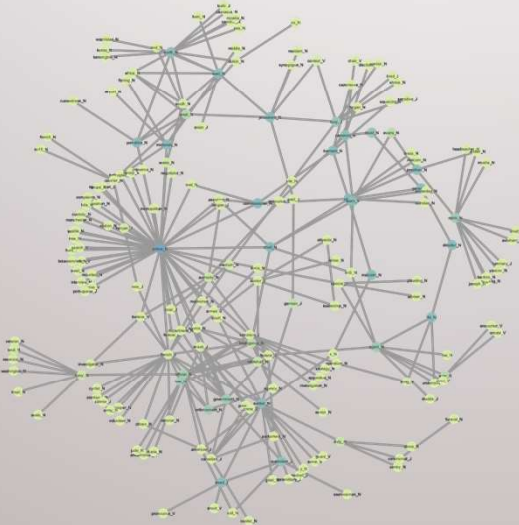
POLICE & ARMY & ALQAEDA & RELIGION
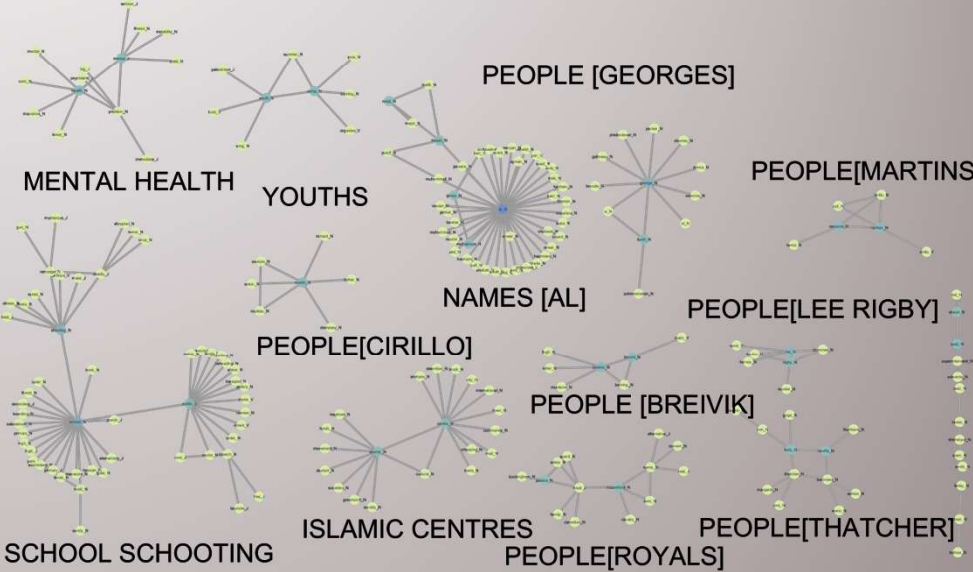
MENTAL HEALTH

YOUTHS

PEOPLE [GEORGES]

PEOPLE[MARTINS]

NAMES [AL]

PEOPLE[CIRILLO]

PEOPLE[LEE RIGBY]

SCHOOL SCHOOTING

ISLAMIC CENTRES

PEOPLE [BREIVIK]
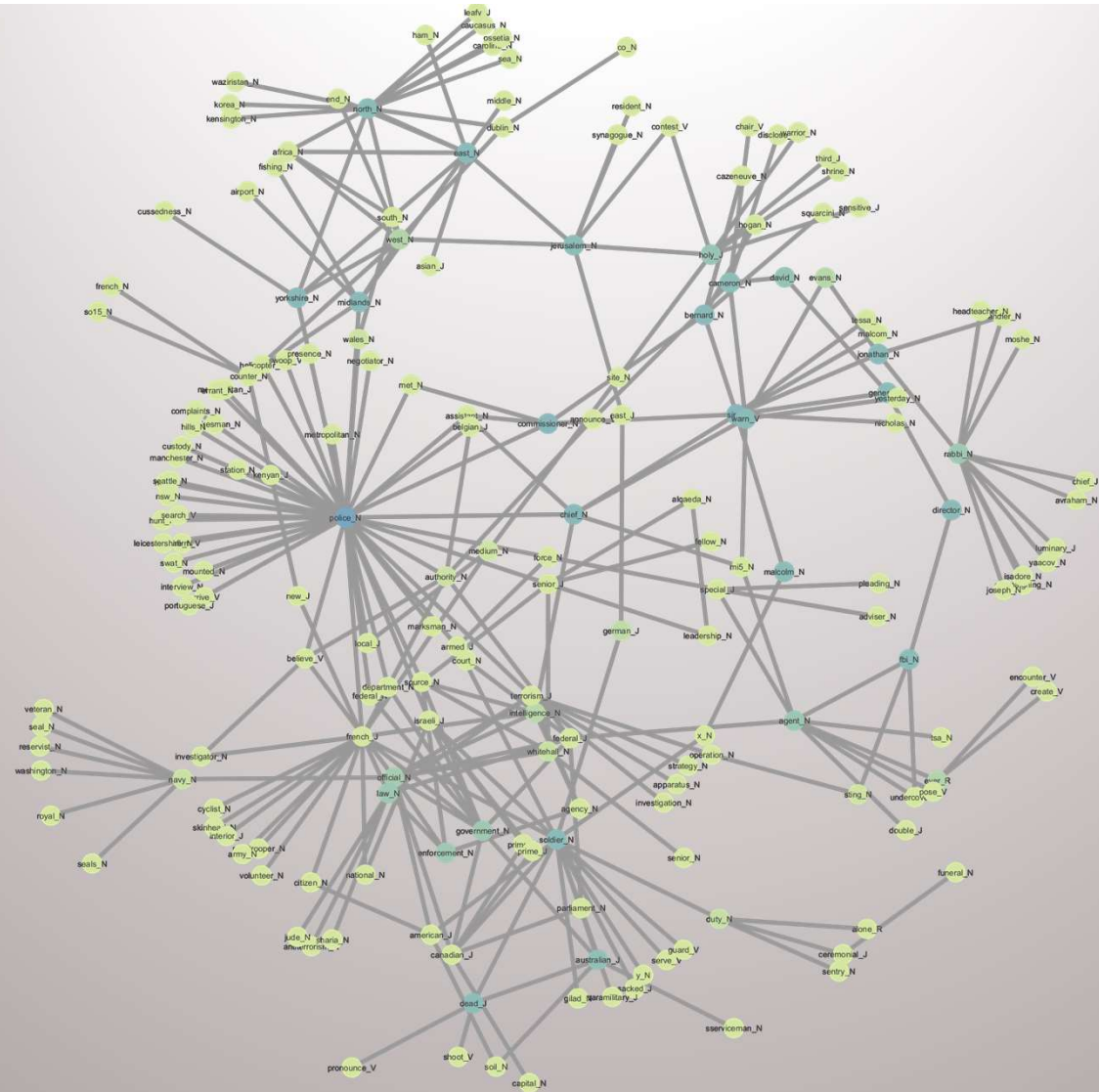
PEOPLE[THATCHER]

PEOPLE[ROYALS]

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POLICE & ARMY & ALQAEDA & RELIGION

PEAK

A PACK OF LONE WOLVES? - MALONE & SCHMUECK

POSTPEAK

PEOPLE[PC]   TERRORIST

FOOTAGE

ATTACKS   COURT PROCEEDINGS

TIME   US

GENERALS

CAMBRIDGE

ISIS & NAMES & JIHAD & POLTICS

TIME & GRAMMAR   PLACES & TARGETS   PRISON & EMERGENCY SERVICES

POLICE

PUBLIC OPINION

NAMES[PAULS]

SUPERMARKET   ALQAEDA
POISON   MEDIA   INTELLIGENCE AIRPLANE   ENCRYPTION
                        AGENCIES   NAMES [DR]   FORMER   ARNDALE

NAMES [STEPHENS] NAMES [PROF]
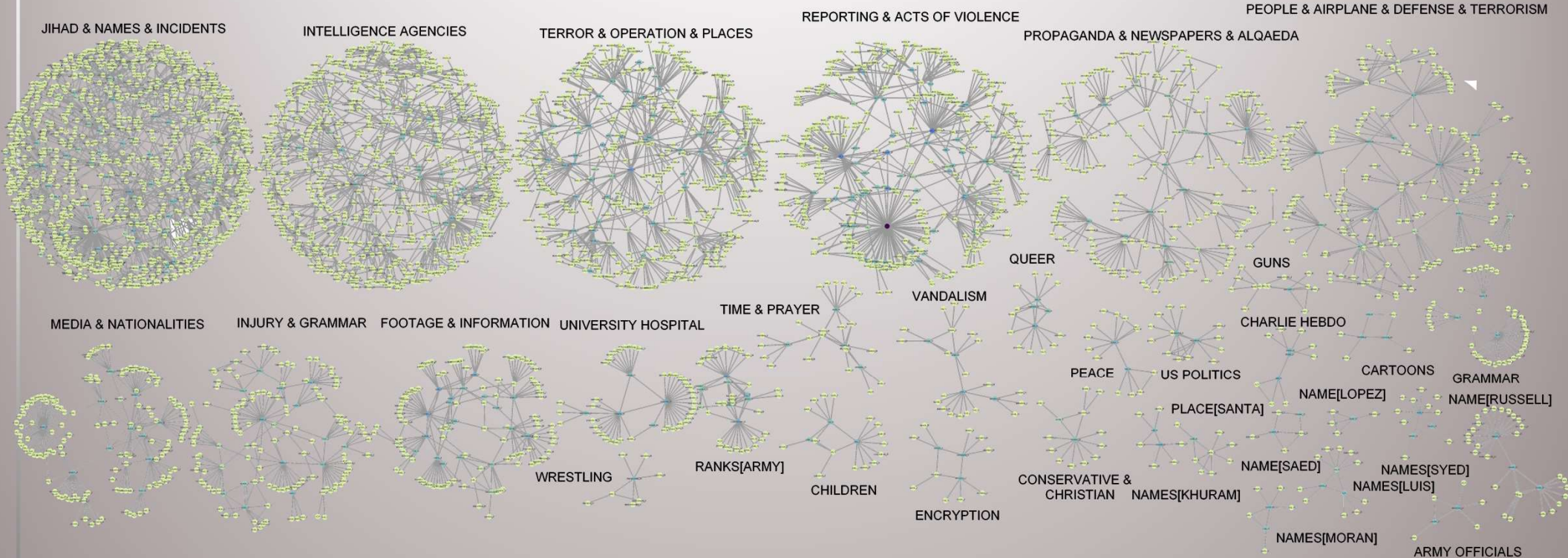
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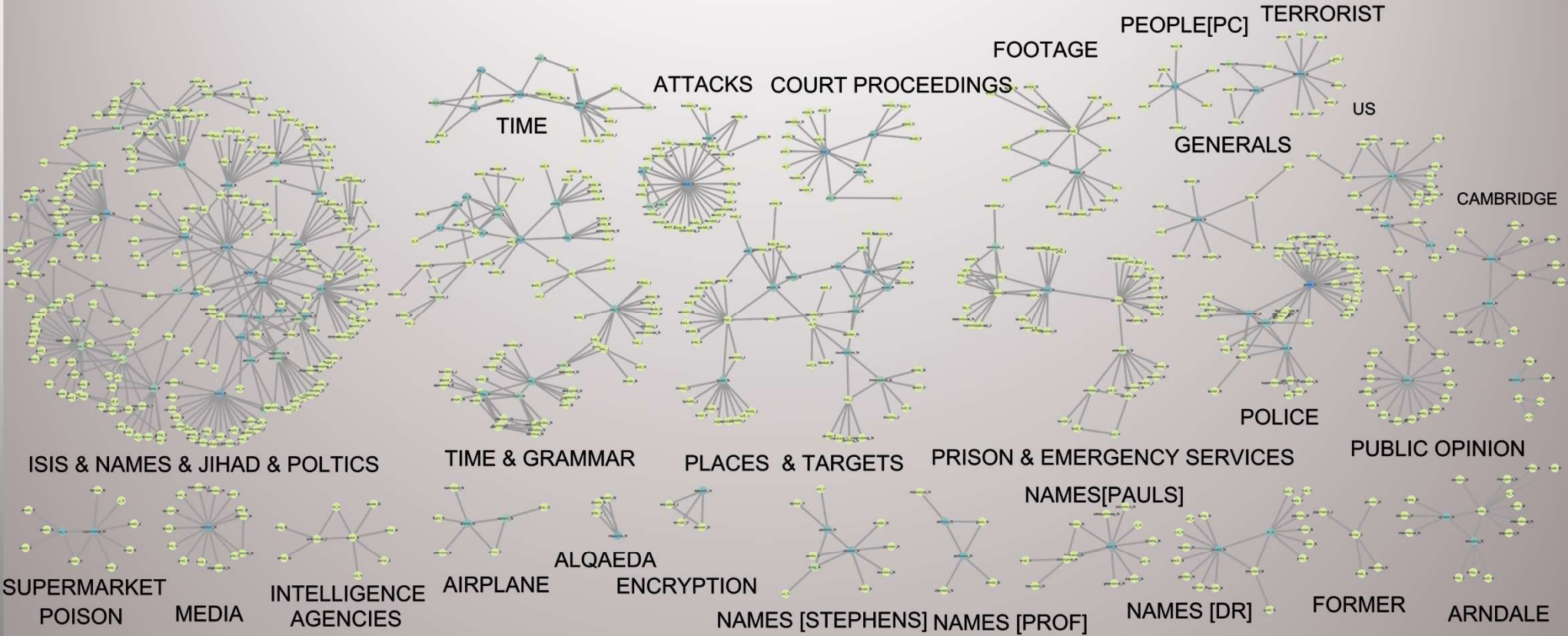
CONCLUSION

- Reporting in the peak time is not just most verbose, but also most collocationally dense

- Prepeak and peak are more collocationally similar than postpeak and peak

- Overall, the collocation networks share a common core:
  - Strong focus on Islamist attacks, right wing terrorism plays a minor role
  - Prominence of organisations in the contextualisation of lone actors

- Discursive shifts:
  - Abstraction and internationalisation in the peak years
  - Loss of distinct focus on mental health (present in prepeak)

PART II
CORPUS-BASED CDA

THEORY INFORMING INTERPRETATION

Van Leeuwen (2008): Discourse as recontextualization of social practice

- "…all texts, all representations of the world and what is going on in it, however abstract, should be interpreted as representations of social practices… [texts] draw on, and transform, social practices"
  - Bernstein's (1981) concept of "recontextualization"
  - Foucault's (1980) notion of discourse - "a socially constructed knowledge of some social practice" that is defined by its specific context
    - "a field of objects"
    - "the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge"

Based on this, we can understand (in)security discourses discussed today as
  - Concerning with practices/processes of threat identification; focus on how threat objects are (re)positioned within these discourses, particularly in the space left by security "successes"
  - Defined by the highly institutionalised contexts of their production,
    - e.g., the press, security services, political elites
  - Involving representations that are sensitive to the socio-political contexts of their production,
    - e.g., "real-world" happenings, editorial commitments of producing newspapers, quality of reporting (i.e., sensationalist vs in-depth analysis)

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DYNAMICS OF THREAT REPRESENTATION

Buzan's "**Threat Deficit**" (2006) : Security vacuum post-Cold War led to new adversary identification.

- Emergence of discourses presenting "irrational" and "unpredictable" threats
- The War on Terror as a reaction to this security void
- Understood here as the space vacated by the demise of a primary adversary

Heath-Kelly's "**Enmity Forgetting**" (2018): Active relegation of past adversaries

- Strategic repositioning of threats in collective memory; from Al Qaeda to ISIS, from ISIS to..?
- Cyclical pattern in (in)security discourses

Our contribution: *Reimagining Enmity*

- Strategic *re*introduction of previously "forgotten" adversaries as threats
- Indicates a reshuffling of the threat hierarchy when no new adversary/threat is evident
- Empirical observations from the Lone Wolf Corpus

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METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Three interconnected stages (for a similar approach, see Karaminis et al., 2023):

1. **Collocation analysis**
   - unusually frequent co-occurrences between two words (Sinclair, 1991)
   - ∴ subsequent identification of attitudes through the semantic preference and discourse prosody stages

2. **Semantic preference analysis**
   - associations between node/s and groups of semantically-related collocates (Stubbs, 2001: 65)
   - ∴ reveal consistent concepts and/or issues (Phillips, 1989)

3. **Discourse prosody analysis**
   - implicit and explicit attitudes (Stubbs, 2001: 66) toward Al-Qaeda and ISIS
   - ∴ enables a critical discourse analysis of the emerging representations

Practically speaking, in the discourse prosody analysis, we
   - manually annotated all 424 corpus instances of AL QAEDA co-occurring with ISIS
   - investigated a broad analytical window of 100 words either side of the node
   - annotated corpus instances for two categories:
     - nexus-types; Association, Dissociation, Convergence, Divergence
     - surrounding discourses

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EMERGING NEXUS-TYPE 1

Association: foregrounding of shared phenomena, e.g., capability, ideology, objectives, methods, etc.

- Frequency: 75% of instances

- Annual Trend:

- Trend interpretation:
  - Al-Qaeda used as a template for understanding ISIS (e.g., Smith et al., 2020)
  - Various degrees of connection to the lone wolf

Association

Capability

'It should be underlined that IS, Al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups continue to pose a major threat. They have the ongoing intent and capability to conduct terrorist attacks in the West,' Europol said.
[Daily Mail Online, 2018]

Western governments claim that IS might one day, like Al-Qaeda, export terrorism to Europe or the United States. So far, however, the group has expressed little interest in acting outside the Middle East.
[Independent, 2014]

Inspiration

"There's also a threat from individuals who may have been inspired by terrorist groups, including Daesh and al Qaeda, to carry out so-called 'lone actor' attacks targeting public events or places," says the Foreign Office.
[Independent, 2018]

However, a four page intelligence report from the NYPD has confirmed Thompson's self-radicalization and his creeping obsession with terror outfits such as al-Qaeda and Islamic State.
[Daily Mail Online, 2014]

Modus Operandi

Groups like ISIL and al Qaeda want to make this war a war between Islam and America, or between Islam and the West.
[Independent, 2016]

The Spanish officers were referring to the number of jihadists residing on the Continent who have been recruited by Islamic State or groups affiliated to al-Qaeda.
[Times, 2015]

Impact

France is still under a State of Emergency following last year's attacks on Paris, when almost 150 people were murdered by ISIS and Al-Qaeda operatives.
[Daily Mail Online, 2016]

In that year four radical Islamic groups were responsible for three-quarters of all deaths from terrorism: Isis, Boko Haram, the Taliban and al-Qaeda.
[Times Online, 2017]

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EMERGING NEXUS-TYPE 2

Dissociation: contrasting phenomena, e.g., capability, ideology, operational distinctiveness

- Frequency: 11% of instances

- Annual Trend:

- Trend interpretation:
  - Al-Qaeda used as a template for understanding ISIS (e.g., Smith et al., 2020)
  - ISIS positioned as a superior threat to Al-Qaeda

Dissociation

Capability

ISIS militants 'MORE brutal' than al-Qaeda terrorists behind 9/11, claims terror expert
[Express Online, 2015]

Islamic State made you almost nostalgic for al-Qaeda, who seemed rather old-fashioned, thoughtful fellows compared to this monstrous new strain of psychopath.
[Telegraph, 2015]

Isis will become 'al-Qaeda on steroids' after defeat, official warns
[Independent, 2017]

ISIS the new 'super Al-Qaeda' with Europe its main recruiting ground
[Express Online, 2016]

Inspiration

The Bangladeshi immigrant added that he was specifically inspired by ISIS, 'not Al Qaeda'.
[Daily Mail Online, 2017]

Lone operators have come to the fore in recent years as Isis has succeeded where al-Qaeda largely failed in exhorting what one senior British official calls "Nike terrorism", saying "just do it" to Muslims living in the west.
[Financial Times, 2017]

Modus Operandi

By comparison with al-Qaeda, Isis, which has claimed the majority of recent attacks, is multi-dimensional. It owes its strength to the merging of the millenarian ideals of extremist Islam and the Sunni supremacist remnants of the Iraqi Ba'athist state.
[Financial Times, 2016]

Fighting ISIS has been harder than al Qaeda was, he said, because the terrorist organization preys on susceptible individuals, rather than relying on skilled operatives.
[Daily Mail Online, 2015]

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EMERGING NEXUS-TYPE 3

Convergence: characterised by unification, e.g., via collaboration, alliance, or evolution.

- Frequency: 5% of instances

- Annual Trend:

- Trend interpretation:
  - 2015 - shared responsibility for Charlie Hebdo attack
  - 2017 – after the collapse of the Islamic State, speculations of ISIS resurgence

Convergence

Collaboration

Were Paris attacks the first case of al-Qaeda and Isis working together?
[Independent, 2015]

DRONE BOMB:: ISIS and Al-Qaida are feared to be plotting a terror attack on Inauguration Day.
[Daily Star Online, 2017]

Charlie Hebdo: Mourning in Paris
Do the attacks show al-Qaeda and Isis are now working together?

Alliance

There are fears, too, that ISIS and Al Qaeda will team up to create a global terror giant in the wake of his death.
[Sun Online, 2019]

TERROR ARMY: ISIS in talks with al-Qaeda to form deadly ALLIANCE.
[Express Online, 2017]

Isis 'seeking alliance with al-Qaeda', says Iraqi Vice President
[Independent, 2017]

Merger

The successor group could be made up of Al-Qaeda and the remains of IS, he said.. Jane Marriott, UK director of the Joint International Counter Terrorism Unit, said that although crushing the IS caliphate was a positive step, more needed to be done to stop a new group forming.
[Daily Mail, 2017]

Evolution/Genealogy

As al-Qaeda evolved into Isis, he rose rapidly, becoming al-Baghdadi's most trusted lieutenant.
[Times, 2016]

Isis- and its ancestor, al-Qaida- are highly aware of the impact of each" message in blood" (the title given by its propaganda department to a grisly October 2014 video depicting the beheading of a Kurdish man).
[Independent, 2016]

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EMERGING NEXUS-TYPE 4

Divergence is characterised by fragmentation, competition, or direct enmity.

- Frequency: 9% of instances
- Annual Trend:

- Trend interpretation: used to represent ISIS's emergence

Divergence

Split

The Kouachis and Coulibaly knew each other prior to the al-Qaeda and Islamic State split.
[Independent, 2015]

The booklet, originally written in Arabic for al-Qaeda, has been translated and re-released in English by Isil, which split from al-Qaeda in 2014.
[Telegraph, 2016]

Clapper also said al-Qaida, from which the Islamic State spun off, remains an enemy and the U.S. will continue to see cyber threats from China, Russia and North Korea, which is also ramping up its nuclear program.
[Daily Mail Online, 2016]

Competition

He said: 'Al Qaeda and IS are competing with each other to attract the same kind of jihadis.
[Daily Mail Online, 2017]

Other battle-hardened militants, some with training in chemical weapons, have defected to al-Qaeda in Syria.
[Sun Online, 2018]

While the civil war makes it easier for ISIS to grow, the strong al-Qaeda presence makes strong ISIS growth difficult.
[Sun Online, 2018]

Enmity

Islamic State and al-Qaeda in Syria have been fighting each other in the region ever since the al-Qaeda leadership refused to pledge allegiance to IS leader Abu Bakr Baghdadi in 2014.
[Daily Mail Online, 2016]

Al-Qaida 'declares war' on ISIS on 9/11 anniversary
[Daily Star Online, 2015]

Matthew Olsen told ABC News that al-Zawahri speaking out against Baghdadi "suggests that the differences are irreconcilable" between the two groups. It is hoped that the divide between Isis and al-Qaeda can be used by the Western allies to fight against them.
[Independent, 2015]

INTERACTIONS OF (IN)SECURITY DISCOURSES

ASSOCIATION

[1] ...**ISIS**' hold. **Al-Qaeda** is preparing to launch terror attacks on Britain and Europe as the West focuses its attention on crushing **ISIS** a report has claimed. Sources told The Times of a rising threat from the terror group and Defence Secretary Michael Fallon confirmed there has been a resurgence of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, meaning Britain is forced to keep troops on the ground in the country. [Daily Mail Online, 2016]

[2] But groups- **al-Qaida, Isis** or some other affiliate- continue to want to wreak misery... And this comes as al-Qaida has started to rear its head once again, menacing the world through new messages by Hamza bin Laden. [Observer, 2017]

DIVERGENCE

[3] **Al-Qaeda** fear of **Islamic State** after hate preacher Qatada reveals group ripped apart [Express.co.uk, 2016]

[4] Experts believe al-Adnani's death, combine with recent IS territorial losses could leave the door open for an **al-Qaeda** to replace **IS** with its own caliphate. [Daily Mail Online, 2016]

[5] Earlier this year, Max Abrahms, a terrorism academic and expert on al Qaeda based in the US, told MailOnline that Hamza could play a key role in displacing **Islamic State** in the region. He said: '**Al Qaeda** and IS are competing with each other to attract the same kind of jihadis. [Daily Mail Online, 2017]

DISSOCIATION

[6] **IS** A GREATER DANGER THAN **AL QAEDA**- FBI. ISLAMIC State's effort to recruit vulnerable young people through social media has turned it into a greater terror threat than Al Qaeda, the director of the FBI has warned. [Daily Mail, 2015]

[7] **ISIS** is a bigger threat than **al-Qaeda** says Attorney General Loretta Lynch as terror group uses Twitter and social media to recruit members [Daily Mail Online, 2015]

CONVERGENCE

[8] The Belgian also predicted that a new Daesh 2.0' group could emerge after the defeat of IS militants in Iraq and Syria if not enough is done to address their grievances. The successor group could be made up of **Al-Qaeda** and the remains of **IS**, he said. Jane Marriott, UK director of the Joint International Counter Terrorism Unit, said that although crushing the IS caliphate was a positive step, more needed to be done to stop a new group forming. [Daily Mail, 2017]

[9] His warning was echoed by France's former President Francois Hollande, who said Baghdadi's death was "not a fatal blow" against ISIS because it "still has fighters." There are fears, too, that **ISIS** and **Al Qaeda** will team up to create a global terror giant in the wake of his death. At the height of its power, Islamic State ruled over millions of people from northern Syria to the outskirts of Baghdad. [TheSun.co.uk, 2019]

[10] Isis will become 'al-Qaeda on steroids' after defeat, official warns ... **Isis** 'seeking alliance with **al-Qaeda**', says Iraqi Vice President [Independent, 2017]

Imagining ISIS

Forgetting Al-Qaeda

Forgetting ISIS

Reimagining Al-Qaeda
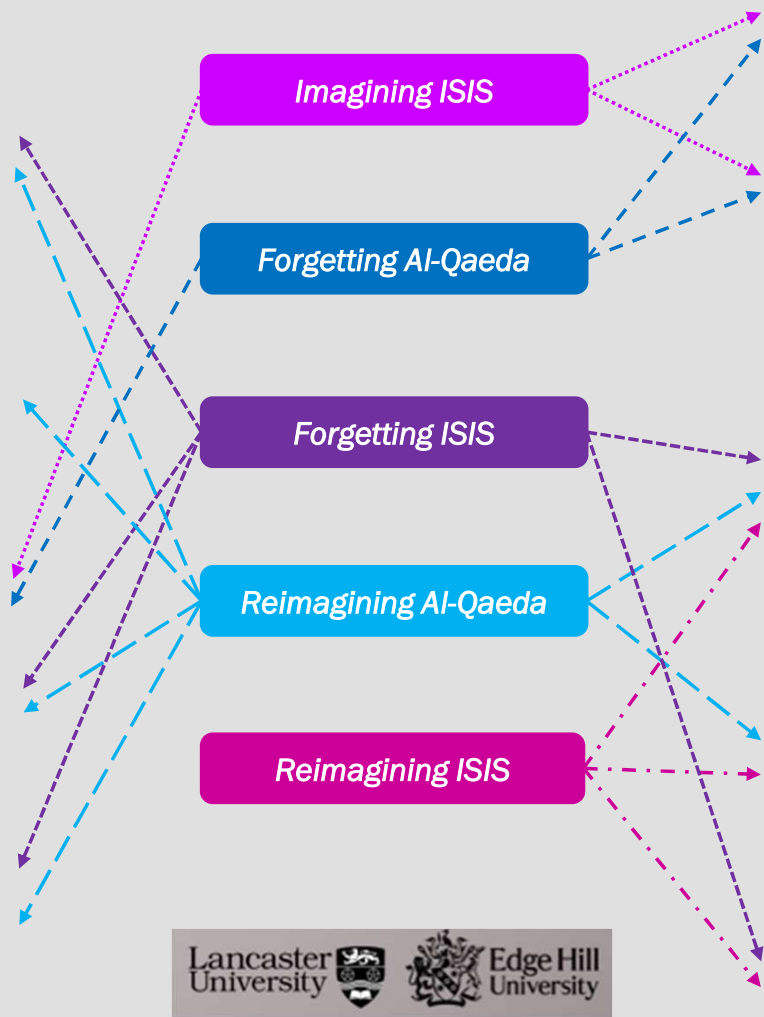
Reimagining ISIS

ENMITY REIMAGINING

Forgetting ISIS

Reimagining Al-Qaeda

Reimagining ISIS

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CONCLUSION

Key Takeaway:

1. Threats in (in)security discourses are not static; they are strategically constructed
2. Threat objects can be reshuffled in these discourses
3. => the practice of threat identification is fundamental to (in)security discourses
4. ∴ questions relating to subjectivity and/or purpose

- Methodologically speaking: Discourse prosody analysis with broadened co-text allowed for complex practices/processes to be revealed

- Drawbacks: cross-section of the AQ-ISIS nexus = relatively low number of instances investigated => to be treated as exploratory

- Future research may consider constructing a topic-specific corpus specifically designed to examine discourses surrounding threat entities. This corpus would comprise texts where the presence of multiple threat objects co-occur.

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