Victims or Victimizers: An Analysis of Western Media Portrayal of the Islamic State's Child Soldiers and American Youth Gang Members

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Abstract

The following research offers a comparative analysis of the perceptions of U.S. juvenile gang members and the ISIS "Cubs of the Caliphate" in Western media. While extensive research has examined whether child soldiers are culpable under various domestic legal systems and under international law, the use of child soldiers by ISIS is a relatively new development and has yet to be thoroughly investigated. Before academic and governmental reports are completed, common news outlets are a primary source of information and craft the narrative for the American public regarding the "Cubs of the Caliphate." This study examines an array of articles from various Western news providers such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, as well as other local sources, that discuss domestic gang or ISIS activities perpetrated by youth. Utilizing a sample of fifty (50) articles, language was identified that characterizes juveniles as either victims immune from blame, or culpable perpetrators. Victims. Based on this content analysis, it was determined that there is a clear media depiction of ISIS' "Cubs" as immune from blame for their actions within ISIS, while there was a mixed portrayal of culpability for American youth in organized gangs. The study ultimately determines that juveniles in the Islamic State are portrayed in Western media as less culpable than American youth in organized gangs, which has an impact on public opinion, and may eventually affect Western legal standards.

Keywords: (child soldiers), gangs, (juvenile delinquency), ISIS

1. Introduction

Recent research has examined the similarities between child soldiers and youth members of American street gangs. Scholars suggest that there are considerable commonalities between the two groups, especially among the more violent examples of each group. Individuals in each group often experience violence as victims, and later use violence as perpetrators. The logical question has often been, are children who commit horrific acts of violence culpable for their actions? Can juveniles who are not fully developed be held responsible for transgressions they commit, even if it is reasonable to expect they suffer from trauma from their childhood or adolescent experiences? Before these questions are even asked in a court of law, they are asked, and quite often answered, by the media. This study seeks to examine whether Western media outlets tend to characterize American youth gang members and child soldiers as culpable or immune from responsibility for their criminal actions. It focuses on media portrayals of a relatively new recruiter of child soldiers on the international stage: the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Islamic State, or Daesh [hereafter ISIS]. ISIS has not been active long enough for extensive scholarly work to have been conducted, so public perception and therefore legal recourse concerning the armed group is greatly influenced by the media. The next question to examine will be, if the experiences of gang members and ISIS' child soldiers, known as the "Cubs of the Caliphate," are so similar, why are they characterized so differently by the media and how will that affect their eligibility for prosecution?

2. Previous Literature

Scholars already acknowledge the clear similarities between typical child soldiers and American youth gang members.[1] Much of the research done in this field has focused on child soldiers used in militant groups in Africa, such as the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone or the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda and South Sudan.[2] As the militant group known as ISIS is a relatively new organization, little research has been done on its child soldiers. This study seeks to extend existing comparative research on child soldiers and youth gang members to the "Cubs of the Caliphate." One of the key similarities between these child soldiers and gang members is the trauma experienced by the children, which expert researcher Patricia Kerig defines as a central component of participation in violent groups, but also risk factor for recruitment. Kerig specifically pinpoints "physical abuse, sexual abuse, and exposure to interparental violence" as risk factors for youth participation in street gangs.[3] Family membership can also be influential; a family member's encouragement for a juvenile to interact with the organization increases likelihood of involvement through socialization into the group.[4] Youth may also be inclined to interact with groups similar to themselves, which often results in ethnically similar gangs in the United States, but can be expanded to religiously affiliated groups like ISIS.[5] Once in the group, youth in American gangs or ISIS experience similar processes of socialization to the group's ideology and functions.[6] These circumstances can be adequately supported through two criminological theories. General Strain Theory explains the formation of militant groups and recruitment processes. Labeling Theory then describes the repeated criminality of organization members. General Strain Theory focuses on stressors which lead to criminal behavior, the main three being (1) the inability to achieve positively valued goals, (2) the lack of access to positively valued stimuli, and (3) the presence of aversive stimuli.[7] In these cases, if an individual believes that he or she is unable to experience success, or are otherwise subject to negative experiences, he or she may be compelled to react in a criminal way. In the case of American gangs, this may include economic, educational, or professional strains, while ISIS' strains are more focused on political and religious conflicts. General Strain Theory reflects why an organized group may form, and why members join to relieve themselves of their stressors. Labeling Theory, however, provides an explanation as to why members continue to offend after joining the groups. This theory requires a primary deviant act, which for these two groups is generally the act that pushed the juvenile to join the group, as explained by General Strain Theory. After this initial act, the label of "criminal" or "deviant" is applied, which in this case is "gang member" or "terrorist." After the application of the label, the individual will reinforce the label by committing secondary deviance, often referred to as the "self-fulfilling prophecy."[8] Once a juvenile has been given a label based on their group affiliation, they are more likely to commit subsequent offenses with their group. With such similar processes of targeted recruitment and socialization into group ideology, as well as criminal theories which can adequately explain their criminal behaviors, it becomes clear that American youth gang members and ISIS' "Cubs of the Caliphate" are exceedingly similar, though their specific doctrines, philosophies, and environments may differ.

The body of literature exclusively examining American youth gangs is steadily growing. Survey studies and participant observation studies have yielded a large amount of quantitative and anecdotal data concerning the formation of gangs, risk and protective factors for gang membership, gang culture, and illicit activity performed by gangs. Gangs are typically urban groups of middle-adolescent boys in which ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented.[9] However, research suggests that the ethnic makeup of youth gangs reflects that of the community, and as many as one-third of gang members are female.[10] The risk factors for gang membership are generally agreed upon and often overlap with the predictors of youth violence. It is understood that these predictors stem from five ecological domains: individual, family, peer, school, and neighborhood.[11] Examples of individual level risk factors include internalizing behaviors, violent behavior, and low self-esteem, while lack of strong commitment to family and positive peers represent family and peer risk factors. According to Kate O'Brien and colleagues, there is less conclusive evidence to support the importance of school and neighborhood risk factors in gang membership[12], which is unsurprising when considering that many "hard-core" gang members often do not attend school. Of particular importance as a predictor of gang membership is exposure to violence, both as a victim and a perpetrator. Taylor observed the role of violent victimization in three stages of a gang member's life: prior to joining the gang, during gang membership, and during exit from gang membership. Of the self-identified youth gang members surveyed, 28 to 57% posited they joined their gangs for protection, presumably from violent home environments or violent peers.[13] Despite joining gangs for protection, those who join gangs are much more likely to be victims of violence, whether it be violence experienced as part of the routine activities of the gang, violent victimization at the hands of a fellow gang member, or attacks by rival gangs.[14] Gang members are often subjected to harsh initiation rituals such as beat-ins, and may be violently victimized as punishment for violating gang rules.[15] It is also estimated that gang members are

victims of homicide at rates 100 times higher than the national average.[16] Regardless of when the violence occurs, the emotional and mental trauma that is produced as a result is almost assuredly a primary contributor to the antisocial, delinquent behavior exhibited by youth gang members and the perpetuation of the cycle of violence in gang culture.

Much like youth gangs in America, the use of children in militant groups internationally carries a large body of scholarly literature. However, the rise of ISIS provides a new territory for exploration. ISIS routinely uses children in their propaganda, including photographs honoring them as martyrs and videos of them executing prisoners.[17] ISIS appears to demonstrate no hesitation in recruiting, training, and deploying children in its operations.[18] John G. Horgan speculates that militant groups use children as a function of organizational pressure to replenish ranks and/or to ensure the group's long-term survival.[19] While current geopolitical and war conditions make it impossible to know exactly how many children are currently involved in ISIS, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented 1,100 Syrian children under 16 years of age who joined ISIS by 2017.[20]

Child soldiers are used across the world, but vast research suggests that there exist commonalities between these groups, despite the differing geopolitical contexts.[21] Across the groups, the shared causes of conflict include: economic despair, social injustice, and political oppression.[22] While large numbers of child soldiers are recruited against their will, the majority of children who join these groups do so voluntarily.[23] These voluntary enlistments are often made within the contexts of poverty and the normalization of war.[24] Many of these children are compelled to join militant groups out of economic necessity, food security, and/or personal security.[25] This is what Augustine Park refers to as "structurally coercive conditions," or the immediate conditions that shape one's life, such as poverty, food insecurity, or personal insecurity.[26] Children become involved with ISIS from at least five distinct sources: (1) children of internally displaced people and foreigners who travel to ISIS-controlled territory; (2) children volunteered by local fighters and civilians; (3) children recruited from local orphanages; (4) children involuntarily taken from their parents; (5) or children who volunteer.[27] Horgan observes that the recruitment of children to ISIS is generally spurred by poverty; children are often incentivized to engage with the group through Qur'an memorization contests or public religious celebrations equipped with toys and sweets.[28] Further, some children are simply kidnapped while some parents choose to enroll their children into ISIS-run schools.[29] Parents receive financial compensation for children put under ISIS's care, but there is an expectation that many of these children will progress to "Cubs of the Caliphate" training after their schooling.[30] ISIS fills a void in these communities by drawing in families with the promise of a free education where there is no existing system of education.[31] After their initial recruitment, children are taken through what Horgan calls the "Six Stages of Child Socialization to ISIS," where they are transformed from "peripheral observers" to "committed insiders."[32] The first stage, "seduction," includes the initial exposure to ISIS ideas, norms, and practices through propaganda and indirect access to personnel. Next is "schooling," where children are subject to direct and routine exposure to personnel and intensive indoctrination. Certain individuals receive focused attention from recruiters, screened for aptitude, and groomed for military training during the "selection" phase, which leads to "subjugation," where children endure physical and psychological brutalization through intensive training, isolation from family, wearing a uniform, and deepening of their commitment through acts of loyalty, sacrifice, and discipline. This stage produces solidarity between the children through shared hardships. During the "specialization" stage, children foster their expertise and are exposed to specialized training. Finally, in the "stationing" stage, roles are assigned and children are deployed.[33] The deliberate use and victimization of children or the "willingness [of ISIS] to broaden the acceptable limits of terrorism to maintain the overall climate of fear" reinforces the message that the group is willing to prolong violence or even escalate the severity of violence till their goals have been reached.[34]

One of the most difficult legal areas surrounding the use of children in militant groups is in defining childhood. The UN has defined immunity for child soldiers at age fifteen, but there is a great deal of sociological and anthropological research that posits that there are a multitude of definitions of childhood across cultures. While children's rights advocates and international law strongly advocate for complete prosecutorial immunity, Christina Martinez Squires believe that the terrorism aspect applied to ISIS's "Cubs of the Caliphate" differentiate them from other child soldier populations, such as those used in Sierra Leone: "treating teenagers joining ISIS just like the teenagers who fought in Sierra Leone not only dilutes the suffering and trauma experienced by those in Sierra Leone, it creates an artificial category that includes all children worldwide who participate in conflict, claiming they do so in the same manner and for the same reasons."[35] Squires speculates that the "terrorism" factor of the "Cubs" confers a greater measure of accountability than is held by other children used in militant groups. Academically, both schools of thought regarding culpability hold scholarly merit and the legal limits of childhood will undoubtedly be debated further on the international stage; but the views of the majority population in the U.S. will not be formed by these academic narratives. The constantly changing conditions of ISIS's movement and actions disallow current and up-to-date scholarly work—instead, the majority opinion of the assignment of culpability of the "Cubs of the Caliphate" will be heavily influenced by the popular news media.

It can be reasoned that policymakers are influenced by the media to which they are exposed, as well as can influence perceptions of the people at large through the policies they create. In the case of lawmakers making legal policies to respond to children who commit crimes, policymakers are subject to the portrayal of these children by Western media. Aside from ordinary media such as newspapers, other influential media factors, namely television crimes series, can contribute to opinions about crime rates, which can influence policy via constituent preferences. Researchers at California State University at Bakersfield found that the media influenced viewers to increase fear of crime, though their study included crime television shows in addition to news media, a potentially conflating variable in this study.[36] Dowler's study concluded that the majority of public understanding regarding crime and justice is in fact based on the public's media consumption.[37] Further, it is argued that news coverage focused on particular issues, "creates implied consensus on those issues."[38] The "perceived" tone of this media coverage becomes the cited public opinion, regardless of if the coverage accurately reflects underlying public opinion.[39] This study focuses on news media, because according to Niagara University's Elizabeth K. Brown, seventy-three percent of political actors cited news media as the most common and reliable source of public opinion, using it as an indicator of the public consensus and noting that "[i[t is political actors' perceptions of public opinion, framed by news media coverage and a range of other forces, which create the 'bounded space' within which policy choices can be determined or justified."[40] Of course, public opinion is also extremely influential at the voting booths, where voters can exercise their opinion by choosing representatives who reflect their beliefs.

3. Methodology

Though American youth gang members and ISIS' "Cubs of the Caliphate" both receive Western media attention, there are no studies conducted to examine the similarities and differences in media portrayal. The criminological similarities have been established in existing literature, but the differences in legal culpability of these two groups are likely influenced by outside forces, including media influence. In this study, media influence was evaluated through portrayal of U.S. gang members relative to juveniles engaged with ISIS as either culpable for crimes or immune from responsibility based on a content analysis. Twenty-five (25) Western news articles exclusively written about child soldiers in the ISIS militant group were examined, as well as twenty-five (25) Western news articles exclusively on children used in gang activity, for a total sample of fifty (50) articles. This number was selected due to the limited available sources meeting the selection criteria, as well as limited time. This target number allows for a large range of media sources per topic without becoming too exhaustive for analysis. To be included in the data set, the article had to discuss either American youth gang members or juveniles engaged with ISIS as the focus of the article, specifically mention juvenile status, and discuss either the juveniles' entry into the combatant group or their overall role or contribution. Articles were chosen that represent a wide range of media sources that include lesser known outlets as well as common popular sources to provide a more thorough view of public media exposure. In the case of articles which discussed both groups, separate content analyses were performed on language specific to the respective group. While there is a plethora of articles written specifically about their adult counterparts, there is limited media attention dedicated solely to juveniles in the armed groups. Western media outlets were selected as they were easily acceptable to researchers located within the United States and were written in the English language. Sources included: *Boston Globe* (1), *Catholic Online* (1), *Chicago Tribune* (2), *CNN* (2), *Daily Mail* (1), *Evening Standard* (1), *Fox News* (4), *Front Page Magazine* (1), *Huffington Post* (1), *Tucson News Now* (KKTU) (1), *La Prensa San Diego* (1), *Mirror* (2), *New York Daily News* (1), *New York Times* (9), *Newsweek* (1), *NPR* (1), *PBS* (1), *Philadelphia Tribune* (1), *Science Daily* (1), *Security Weekly* (1), *Sun Sentinel* (1), *The Christian Science Monitor* (1), *The Daily Mail* (1), *The Guardian* (1), *The Independent* (2), *The New Yorker* (2), *The Observer* (1), *The Sun* (2), *The Trace* (1), *The Toronto Sun* (1), *USA Today* (1), and *Washington Post* (2). All articles about ISIS' child soldiers were written after 2014, while 88% of the articles about American youth in gangs were written after 2014, making the sources relevant and recent. All of the articles were written by different authors, accounting for some news outlets having more representation than others, due to the higher number of journalists writing on these specific topics. More popular news outlets, such as the *New York Times* and *Fox News* were also given larger representation in the sample because of their wider readership, as they are likely to have a greater effect on public opinion. Given the scope of some of the news outlets, including the influence of their publication location, not all the commonly utilized news outlets had articles about both subjects. Similarly, the limited scope of this research meant that only news outlets who have published on ISIS' child soldiers or American youth in gangs were included in the sample. Though this may contribute to a biased sample of news sources, this line of research welcomes examples of media bias, as it exemplifies the common stereotypes on these subjects. Western news outlets will shape public opinion of the "Cubs of the Caliphate" and American youth gangs, and subsequently has the power to shape public policy hereafter. Lawmakers in the United States may be influenced

by the characterization of juvenile delinquency in the media, so it is crucial to capture a representative sample of articles that may shape how policy-makers themselves view juvenile offenders.

While not all are considered common, popular, or highly reviewed media producers, they explore a wide range of media. Local, niche, or otherwise uncommon media outlets were utilized to provide a range of media exposure that expanded beyond common popular sources. This was a choice made to include a variety of media outlets available, but also to include articles that do not necessarily adhere to the requirements of popular sources, such as political leaning, political/social correctness, or other rules for conventional popular journalists.

A content analysis was performed on each source to explore competing narratives. In order to designate each source as referring to child soldiers or youth gang members as either culpable or non-culpable, the language of each source was separated into having either culpable or non-culpable connotations. This included developing word banks for language that implies *culpability* for actions or crimes versus *immunity* from blame. Words were cataloged based largely on common connotation. Words that evoked a clear and strong categorization of culpability or immunity were immediately added to the respective word bank and given an asterisk to note the most extreme polarization. Words which may indicate a bias towards culpability or immunity, but were not as strong or clear were analyzed further by finding synonyms through a thesaurus website. If synonyms generally indicated a bias towards culpability or immunity, the word was added to the respective word banks, shown in *Tables 1* and *2*. After the word bank was crafted, each article was read through and any words found in the word bank were recorded as biased towards immunity or culpability. At the end of this process, the side, either immunity or culpability, with the most words was recorded as the article's overall bias. For most of the articles, this bias was clearly visible through the number of biased words, with a strong majority of words or phrases indicating immunity or culpability. For articles with less pronounced biases, more weight was given to the side with the most extreme or polarizing words that had been already identified. There were very few articles that reflected more than one portrayal of culpability or immunity. In almost every article, there was a definitive and unwavering characterization of culpability, so there was no need to weight individual articles by the amount of immune or culpable language.[41] This process was repeated for all fifty (50) articles and the tables were subsequently used for the analysis and discussion. The analysis process was conducted by one researcher to ensure consistency in categorization for the entire pool of articles.

Table 1**:** American Youth Gang Members Word Bank

Culpability		Immunity	
Talent	Employees	Survival	Forgotten Dreams
Responsible	Hardened	At-risk	Hopeless
Looking for positive reinforcement	notorious	Stereotypes	Myth
Causing trouble	violent	Lured	Troubled
Uncooperative	Easier to deal drugs	Acting out	Pushing our children out of school
Rather steal than work	Had other options	Support	Developmental delays
Can distinguish right from wrong	Hunting	Turn their lives around	Apocalyptic language
Emulate lifestyle	Not indoctrinated	Dehumanized our children	Remorseful heart

Targeting	Joining	Unique capacity for resilience, growth, and change	Hard to get work
Someone they can relate to	Like violence	Boyishness	Powerlessness
Think gangs are cool	Impress	Nervous flurries	Drifting into delinquency
One of the brothers	Proud	Instructed	Had no choice
Allowed their allegiance	Hoodlums	You see and you do	Intervening
Wannabees	Enlist	Low educational attainment and high poverty	Indoctrinated
Showing off	Establish dominance	Influenced	Believe it is normal
Allure of hip-hop stardom	Rite of passage	Groomed	Gassed up
Brutality	Men (when referring to individuals under 18)	Vulnerable	Normalized
Respect	Ruthless	Desensitized to violence	Preyed
Bully	Lifestyle	Babies	Untreated vicarious trauma
Aspiration	Terrorized	Cycle of violence	Coached
Capitalist sedition		Enticed	Susceptible

Table 2: ISIS' "Cubs of the Caliphate" Word Bank

Culpability		Immunity	
Converted	Recruited	Beat	Indoctrinated
Learn to love ISIS	Killing machines	Afraid	Weapons
Stone cold murderers	Warriors	Forced	Dreamed of attending college
Don't be fooled	Willing	Tried to counter	Exploitation
Brutal	Savage	Confusion	Victim
Murdering	Slaughtering	Fear	Barely old enough to drive
Terrorists	Terror tots	Captured	Grooming
Killers	Criminals	Diseased ideology	Radicalization
Fled the country to fight	Drawn to the caliphate	Impressionable	Student
Raiding		Malleable	Naivety
		Targeted	Brainwashed
		Ensnared	Torn from their families
		Promised	Scared
		Raised to hate	Poison the minds
		Coercion	Vulnerable
		Exposure to violence	Propaganda
		Dislocate the families	Enslaved
		Terrified	Abducted
		Using children as weapons	Brutalizing

		Captive	Traumatized
		Used for military purposes	Poisoned
		Only protection	Instructed
		Manipulation	Controlled

4. Results and Discussion

The content analysis revealed that only 12% of articles discussing ISIS's use of child soldiers indicated culpability (3/25) while 52% of articles discussing American youth gang members indicated culpability (13/25). Drawing from these results, foreign juvenile delinquents in the Islamic State are portrayed in Western media as less culpable than domestic juvenile delinquents in organized gangs. Though existing literature indicates that child soldiers, including ISIS youth combatants, and American youth gang members experience similar trauma and that the deviance of both populations can be linked to comparable criminological rationalization, there is a clear discrepancy between the established research and media portrayal. Much of the narrative regarding child soldiers in ISIS characterizes the juveniles as not responsible for their actions, but the results found mixed characterizations of juvenile gang members in the United States. Western media outlets identified ISIS' child soldiers are victims far more consistently than the Western media depiction of American youth in gangs, who were categorized as both victims and perpetrators by various news sources. These portrayals are similarly reflected in how the law responds to the two groups.

Legal ambiguities on the international level exist as to whether child soldiers are legally culpable actors, but currently, the ICC lacks jurisdiction to prosecute any individual under the age of eighteen, and even considers it a war crime to recruit or enlist a juvenile under 15 to participate actively in hostilities—regardless of the juvenile volunteered. While the states in which ISIS operates are not members of the ICC, the Rome Statute governing the ICC sets the benchmark for contemporary international criminal law.

Conversely, the legal system in the United States allows juveniles to be charged with crimes, and treated as adults in the courts through administrative transfer. Though the juvenile justice system was originally developed in Chicago on behalf of child advocates seeking rehabilitation for the city's neediest children[42], the past century or so has seen significant changes. Juveniles were not immune to the "tough on crime" initiatives, and those with gang affiliations were especially vulnerable. In states with high proportions of gang members, such as California, a piece of legislation known as the Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act (STEP) has been passed to strengthen sentences of known gang members. In the cases of gang members, juveniles are eligible for sentence enhancements if tried in the adult criminal justice system.[43] Similar legislation exists in other states that strengthens penalties based on gang affiliation. Juveniles in gangs in the United States face enhanced sentences based on their ties to organizations, but there are no clear policies, internationally or domestically, for underage ISIS combatants. These legal differences are at odds with their criminological differences, or lack thereof.

Given the international uncertainty on whether and how to prosecute juveniles who commit crimes on behalf of ISIS, the consequences for juveniles in American gangs are relatively stable and undoubtedly more severe. Even though academic literature finds many similarities between child soldiers and youth gang members in terms of their recruitment, indoctrination and trauma, the narratives told by the media about the two groups differs drastically. One potential explanation for these contrasting narratives is that the legal norms governing these two groups are different. Child soldiers, especially youth forced to fight in various African conflicts such as Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army have received special media attention regarding their unique psychological trauma. Anecdotes often depict child soldiers as being pre-teens at the time of conscription and emphasize abduction or otherwise involuntary recruitment. American youth gang members have not received the same legal consideration, and though they fall under the international criteria for child soldiers, they are rarely categorized as such. Rather than being granted leniency, American youth gang members may be subsequently given harsher characterizations than foreign child soldier. The International Criminal Court has no jurisdiction for juveniles under the age of 18, and suggests that those under 15 are not responsible for acts of war, but in America, gang affiliation and ties to organized gangs is often an aggravating factor in the legal system regardless of an individual's age. While overwhelming research identifies the close

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similarities between child soldiers and youth gang members in several aspects, the legal norms perpetuate the differentiation of child soldiers as victims while youth gang members are deemed victimizers.

5. Conclusion

Extensive scholarly research has found psychological and environmental similarities between children in armed conflicts abroad and juveniles in Western delinquent gangs. While investigation of the legal culpability of child soldiers is not a new controversy, ISIS' use of children in combat is a relatively recent development. As with many controversies, media accounts, rather than academic research, are driving the narrative of these children and juveniles and thus shaping public opinion regarding their culpability. While numerous connections can be drawn between stressors and motivators experienced by the two groups of juvenile "deviants," this study found that there exists a strong competing narrative between them in the eyes of the media. Overall, juveniles engaged with the Islamic State were given a more forgiving portrayal of victimhood by Western media, as opposed to the mixed portrayal of American youth in organized gangs. This difference is expressed in the language used to describe the juveniles; language which is used to describe the "Cubs of the Caliphate" is more forgiving than the rhetoric used to describe youth gang members in Western media. Due to this discrepancy, the perceived culpability of the "Cubs of the Caliphate" is considered to be less than that of juvenile gang members. Further research should continue to examine the similarities and differences between child soldiers and gang members to determine if there is any psychological basis to the determination that child soldiers are less culpable than gang members, and if so, what legal paths should be taken to account for this discrepancy. Additionally, further research should include an analysis of the development of public perception and public policy alongside the development of the media narrative regarding youth gang activity and child soldiers in order to investigate the correlation between media and perception.

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