2023 CHEMICAL SECURITY SUMMIT

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#ChemicalSecurity

CHEMICAL SECURITY SUMMIT

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Academic Perspective: Terrorist Organizations and Tactics

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TRENDS IN TARGETING & TACTICS AMONG CONTEMPORARY TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

August 30, 2023

Dr. Tricia Bacon
American University

AGENDA:
IDENTIFYING POINTS OF TACTICAL & TARGETING CHANGES

1. THE ROLE OF LEADERS IN TARGETING & TACTICS
2. SUCCESSOR TYPES & TARGETING/TACTICS
3. ALLIANCES & TACTICAL CHANGES

THE ROLE OF LEADERS IN TARGETING & TACTICS

THE CENTRAL ROLE OF FOUNDERS

Founders create the HOW and the WHY for their organization:

HOW

The tactics and resource mobilization that the group uses to achieve its goals.

WHY

The group's objectives and the framing that explains them.

THE CHOICE FOR SUCCESSORS

To what extent will the SUCCESSOR follow the how and why of the founder?

- **INCREMENTAL versus DISCONTINUOUS change**

DISCONTINUOUS CHANGE: WHAT DEFINES A SUCCESSOR

Changes to the WHY

Discontinuous changes in framing include emphasizing a new adversary as the primary enemy. It could further take the shape of expanding the cause into new ideological areas.

Changes to the HOW

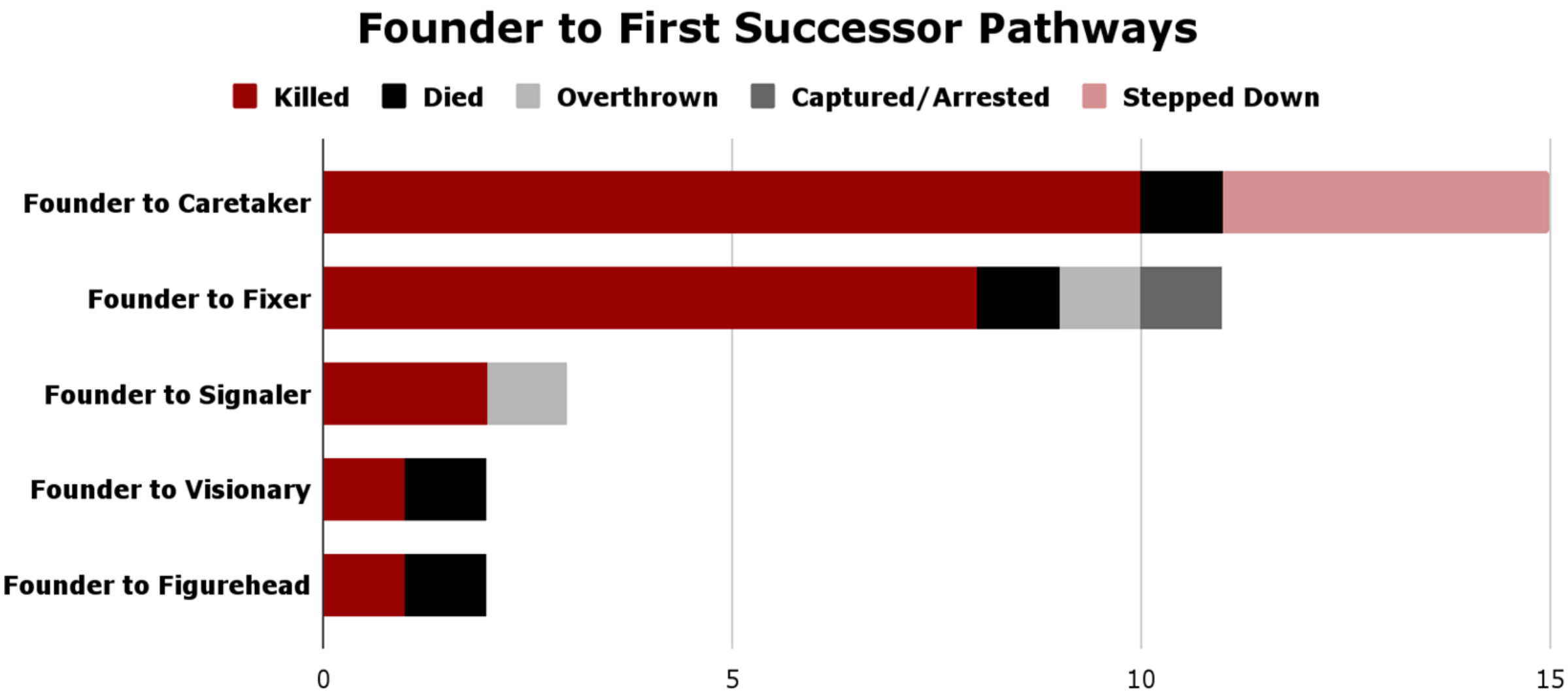
Discontinuous changes in tactics and resource mobilization look like conducting operations in a new place (such as external attacks), adopting a new tactic and rendering it one of the group's main tactics, or even creating a political party.

SUCCESSOR TYPES & TARGETING/TACTICS

SUCCESSOR TYPES

Leadership Archetypes		
Leader Type	Change to Framing	Change to Tactics and Resource Mobilization
Caretaker	Incremental	Incremental
Signaler	Discontinuous	Incremental
Fixer	Incremental	Discontinuous
Visionary	Discontinuous	Discontinuous
Figurehead	Leader absent	Leader absent

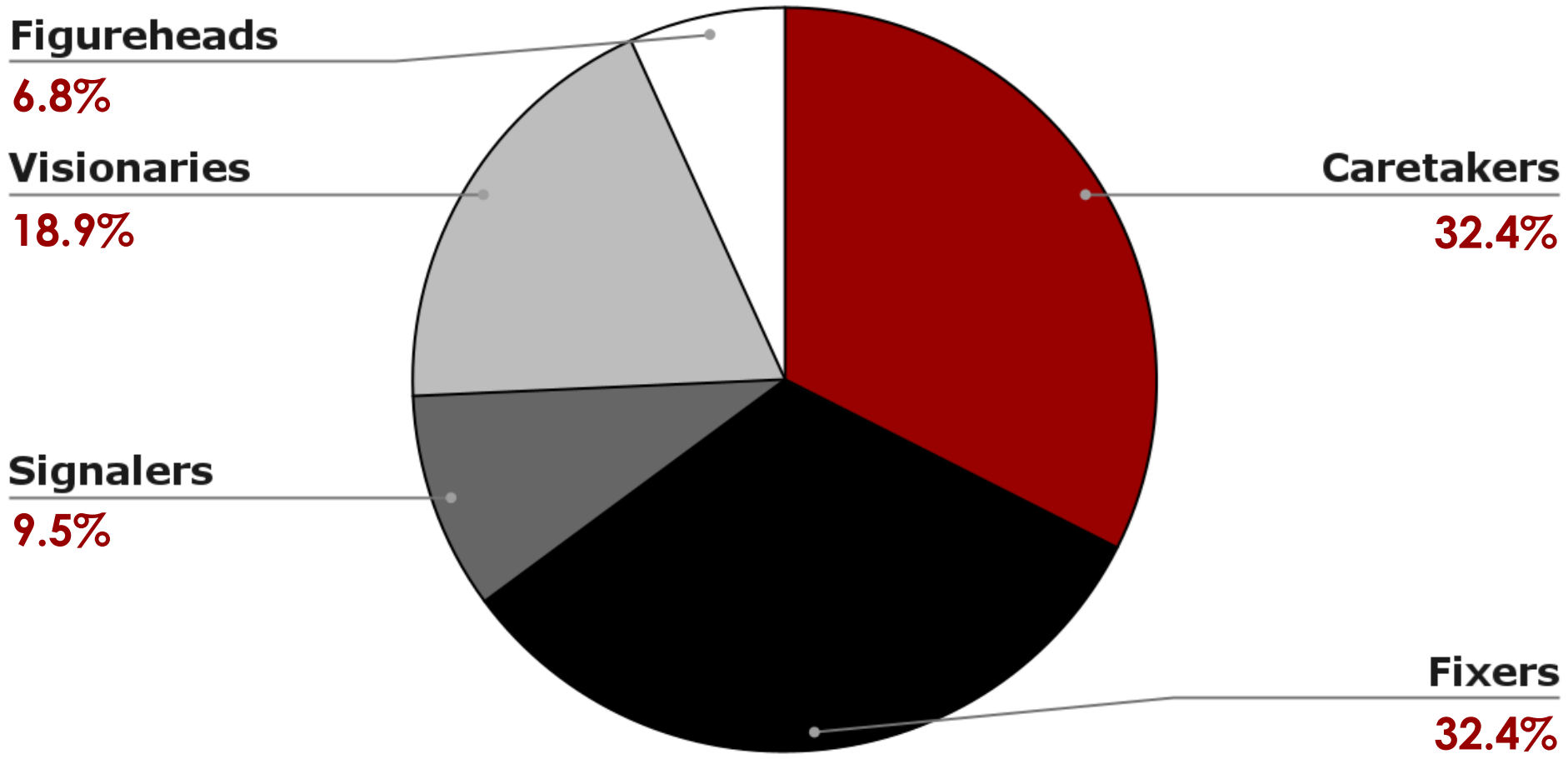
FINDINGS


Founder to First Successor Pathways
Killed
Died
Overthrown
Captured/Arrested
Stepped Down
Founder to Caretaker
Founder to Fixer
Founder to Signaler
Founder to Visionary
Founder to Figurehead
0
5
10
15

FINDINGS

Leadership Type Frequency

38 Founders → 112 Successors



ALLIANCES &
TACTICS/TARGETING

TERRORIST GROUP ALLIANCES & TACTICAL CHANGES

COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN NON-RIVAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Training
- Haven
- Technology transfers

AFFILIATE RELATIONSHIPS & TACTICAL CHANGES

FORMALIZED PLEDGES OF LOYALTY BETWEEN LEADERS

- Training
- Technology transfers
- Alliance networks
- Tactical emulation

RELATIONS WITH STATES & TACTICAL CHANGES

PROXY RELATIONSHIPS

- Training
- Haven
- More desire for control/management
- Careful technology transfers

IDENTIFYING POINTS OF TACTICAL & TARGETING CHANGES

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Q&A

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