

Review of: "Religiously motivated terrorism: a systematic review exploring causal pathways"

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Hankins, McEvoy, and Wright's ^[1] article is a literature review focused on a better understanding religiously motivated terrorism. The researchers initially searched articles and unpublished ("grey") literature written between September 2001 to April 2018 for three key words. The initial search yielded 1275 papers, of which all but 12 were excluded due to not meeting their identified criteria. These 12 articles were evaluated and grouped into two thematic areas: Individual characteristics and sociocultural characteristics.

The researchers limited their review to empirical studies. Given the nature of terrorism, ethically-viable empirically-based studies are difficult to perform. Often, terrorism researchers have had to either rely on empirical evidence or case studies. These two types of articles would not have been included in the authors' study.

The researchers were also limited by the data validity of the published studies. Several of the reviewed studies relied upon interviews of either the terrorists themselves or individuals in their sphere. With any after-action interview, individuals may be more prone to use image management techniques in order to foster good will from the interviewers or judicial systems. Copes et al. ^[2] illustrated that interviews can be beneficial; however, unless they are empirically-focused, then they may not be exceedingly useful. Not only are their confounding variables with the participants, but also with the interviewers.

While outside the scope of the article, literature on cults and cult-based terrorism (e.g., Aum Shinrikyo attacks^[3], the Rajneeshees' bioterror salad bar attack ^[4], etc.) may have provided valuable insight to better frame the discussion. These events demonstrate the resolve of individuals to further their religious goals.

Overall, this article represents a succinct, descriptive approach to the topic. It showcases the limits of empirical articles available on the topic, and it provides some suggestions on future studies.

References

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