

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

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This is a worthy article on an important and timely topic. I found the criteria for inclusion/exclusion of articles to be well defined and the assessment of the included articles to be useful.

There are a few issues in this topic area that I wished the authors had developed further, and which a reader may want to consider. At the top of that list is the issue of injustice. The research on injustice is showing it to be a fundamental motivator for all people, not only those inclined to be violent, as well as a common theme across all types large scale violence. The authors touch on this when they note such issues as the "perception of unfairness" as well as the role of the US military presence in provoking terrorism. One only need to look at the use of injustice by Russia in justifying the war against Ukraine to see how it can be a tool to motivate a population. I think this is an important topic that needs further development to help better understand the use of perceived injustice to motivate people to acts of terror.

A related issue is that of genocide. The review might have used a few additional synonyms of terrorism, such as genocide, to tap into a larger body of research. The drivers of genocide are much the same as terrorism, especially in the use of injustice as noted above. A review of any major genocide in history will show that it includes the the portrayal of a target group as evil and even inhuman, as well as the conflation of religious, political, and nationalistic issues. The genocide in Rwanda is one example of this process that has been widely reported. Once people are successfully divided into groups of good versus evil then violence becomes morally justified, even necessary.

Likewise, the impact of the presence of US military is also, in my opinion, as better understand as a not so much a channel for terrorism but an opportunity to create a sense of injustice and nationalistic threat that can also be religious when the religious and national spheres are conflated.

I agree with the authors noting the challenges of doing research on terrorism and appreciate how they call for attention to those who are vulnerable. They also importantly note that the focus on Islamist terrorism is a function of the time frame. Here again, I think both a wider time frame and inclusion of genocide would show that it is a phenomenon that cuts across fatih groups. Such a broader approach might help counter the misperception that terrorism is a Muslim phenomenon while also showing that the roots of mass violence are very much with us today.