POLS 429: International Terrorism
Lecture 13 (02.12.2020):
Explaining Terrorism - The Ideological Approach Vol. 2

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Overview

Review

WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- A belief system as a cause for terrorism.
- **Secular ideologies**: left-wing (selective violence), right-wing and racial view, Nationalist-Separatist.
- **Religious ideologies**: faith based doctrine, violence intended to satisfy theological demands, Islamic (Sunni), Christian and Jewish extreme ideologies.

Questions??

The Ideological Approach: Assumptions

- Research main objective: identify commonalities across different ideologies.

  Assumption 1: Taking preferences seriously

- Identify the source of individual/group preferences (contrast to strategic approach).
- Which ideologies motivate and make violence seems legitimate so that terrorism becomes a desirable method?
- Example: Elites exploit masses $\rightarrow$ armed struggle.

The Ideological Approach

Assumption 2: Agnostic about unit of analysis

- Ideologies $\rightarrow$ individuals, groups or entire societies.
- Individual: "The Unabomber".
- Group ("Aum Shinrikyo", Japan): spread radical ideology across entire Japanese society.
- Fascism and anti-Semitism (1930's Europe): prevalent across broad sections of society.
- Allowed the rise of the Nazi party to power in Germany.

The Ideological Approach

Assumption 3: Features can predict whether and how group turn violent

- Answer puzzles that other approaches cannot explain.
- Key elements:
  1. Intransigence: cosmic, collective struggle with clear stakes and no compromise. ▸ ReligionWar
  2. "Faceless", collective, inhumane enemy ("dogs","infidels").
  3. Struggle require personal"larger than life" sacrifice.

- Example - religious groups, lethality and the role of afterlife.

The Ideological Approach

Assumption 4: Symbolic Violence

- Terrorism as visual (symbolic) rather than strategic act.
- Focus on symbolic targets rather than the "actual enemy".
- Example - Orlando 2016 (location, timing).

Assumption 5: Ideology motivates and justifies violence

- Ideology as a causal effect, not post-hoc justification.

The Ideological approach

IMPLICATIONS

- Rely on primary sources for empirical testing.

(1) Radicalization pushes nonviolent believers in an ideology to becoming supporters of violence

- Radicalization $\rightarrow$ re-framing various grievances in "larger scale" terms.
- Good vs. evil: making the terror act an altruistic one.
- **Evidence**: Memoirs and manifestos showing internal discourse turning radical **before** attacks.

The Ideological Approach

(2) Extreme belief motivate more deadly terrorism

- Uncompromising and dehumanizing beliefs drive individuals to more extreme violence.
- Distinguish secular and religious ideologies:
  - Secular $\rightarrow$ audience is the public, intended to correct flaws and change system.
  - Religious $\rightarrow$ audience is supernatural power that transcends human system (a deity that sanctions and blesses violence).
- **Evidence** - groups target nonbelievers, or data that religious terror is more lethal.

The Ideological Approach

(3) Strategically counterproductive behavior

- Counterproductive methods persist due to ideological motivation.
- Examples, ISIS:
  1. Fight over Dabiq (Syria): the Prophet's words.
  2. Banned smoking and alienated the population.
  3. Refusal to cooperate with other Salafi groups that do not swear obedience to IS.

- **Evidence** - target an entire out-group rather than a specific enemy; view moderate believers as traitors.

The Ideological Approach

(4) Violence for its own Sake

- Beliefs in the need to 'exterminate' particular peoples within a commitment for being a true believer $\rightarrow$ terrorism is the goal.
- **Evidence** - Shi'a terrorists in Lebanon (Hoffman 2006): "their sole preoccupation was serving God through the fulfillment of their divinely ordained mission".

(5) Never ending Terrorism

- Terror continues until ideological commitments are fulfilled.
- View ineffective operations as a setback in a cosmic struggle.

The Ideological Approach

COUNTERING TERRORISM

- Counter radicalization using persuasion, public discussions ("win the war of ideas" with a competing narrative).
- Example: ISIS defectors admissions on the fallacy of the group's ideas.
- Identify followers of violent ideology and prevent further radicalization: severe violations of human rights.
- Eradicate ideological terrorism with widespread repression: moral issues such as targeting individuals' beliefs.

The Ideological Approach: Critiques

Critique 1: Correlation is not Causation ▸ NotCausation

- Individual (group) that follow ideology does not necessarily mean that this is the motivation for violence.
- Example - Timothy McVeigh (Oklahoma City, 1995) and Christian extremism.
- More?

Critique 2: Ideology is unobservable

- We cannot clearly observe and classify ideology.
- Even with evidence from perpetrators, we cannot be sure this is the actual motivation for violence.

The Ideological Approach

Critique 3: Ideologies are not monolithic

- Groups almost never possess one, clear-cut and straightforward ideological commitment.
- Examples: PLO (nationalist and left-wing); KKK (religious and racial); IS (nihilistic and religious).
- Overlap complicates isolating the clear cause of violence.

Critique 4: Ideology cannot explain timing of terrorism

- Ideology is consistent over time, terror attacks peak and drop.
- Groups with similar ideology execute different types of violence (Peruvian civil war - Maosit left wing groups).

The Ideological Approach

Critique 5: Ideology cannot explain why only some extremists become terrorists

- Only fraction of extremists turn to terrorism.
- An insufficient explanation.

Critique 6: Motivation and justification are impossible to differentiate

- True motivation versus post-hoc justification of terrorism?
- Examples:
    1. Noble and altruistic acts $\rightarrow$ during planning stage?
    2. Strategic justification post-attack (social desirability).

The Ideological Approach

Critique 7: Policy implications are immoral

- Policy options involve many normative issues.

- To combat terrorism, governments must violate norms of freedom and many human rights.

- Focus policy on Islam as threatening ideology - further intensifies negative views and polarization of society.

- More motivation for policy of **Profiling**.

Recommended readings

More studies on the topic of ideological approach to terrorism:

1. Victor Asal and R. Karl Rethemeyer, "Dilettantes, Ideologues, and the Weak: Terrorists Who Don't Kill," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2008), pp. 244-263.

2. Daniel Masters, "The Origins of Terrorist Threats: Religious, Separatist, or Something Else?" *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (2008), pp. 396-414.

3. David C. Rapoport, "Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (1984), pp. 658-677.
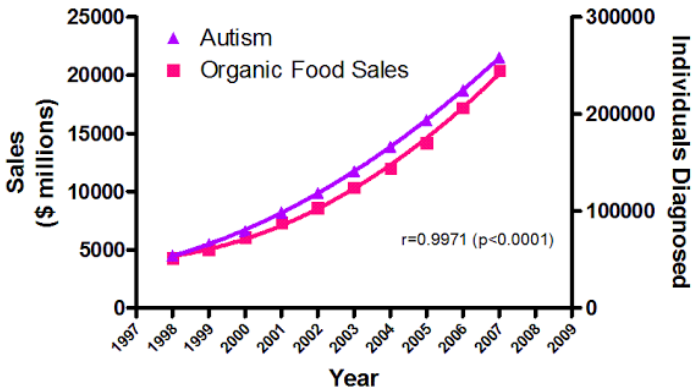
On correlation and causation → LINK

Religious War

Terror in the mind of God: The Global Rise of religious Violence (Jurgensmeyer 2003).

- Elements that display the struggle as a cosmic war:
  1. Defending identity, freedom and dignity.
  2. Losing is unthinkable, it is better to die than remain within the current system.
  3. The struggle is nearly impossible to win in real time.
- Victory → in god's hands (will benefit everyone).
- Such description requires violence to resolve struggle.

Correlation and Causation Fallacy

The real cause of increasing autism prevalence?