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## Trends. The Latest on Terrorist Motivation

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Abstract: This article examines the motivations of terrorists for becoming terrorists.

The question of why terrorists become terrorists continues to resonate within global public discourse. A better question may be why various people engage in terrorist behavior or support it--given that terrorists are not only terrorists but also people encompassing terrorist and non-terrorist psychology and behavior.

Nevertheless, a common variant of expert certitude on terrorist motivation relates to poverty and illiteracy as causal variables. Yet empirical data suggest that many terrorist acts are perpetrated, planned, and supported by individuals who by most comparisons are not poor and quite literate. Thus, poverty and illiteracy may be neither necessary nor sufficient but still could be necessary and/or sufficient in certain cases.

Then, there is the notion of humiliation as a salient motivational factor for terrorism based on a sequence of comparative analyses between putative ideal states and constructed realities of the past, present, and future. However, humiliation can take many pathways, including non-terrorist ones and others proscribing or mitigating against action at all. Yet, humiliation might be necessary and/or sufficient for terrorism in certain cases.

Other common variants of expert certitude on terrorist motivation include contact with mass media-transmitted violent actions, social learning and vicarious conditioning in a local culture related to political violence as a highly valued activity, so-called brainwashing, and sacred and secular rages based on disparities between interpretations of ideology of reality and constructions of reality. All the above may be induced by or associated with variables "outside" an individual, such as national economic isolation.

It is likely that the study of motivation will continue in a reactive context--viz., after terrorist acts--because the false positives and negatives of a proactive system for the identification of individuals before they perpetrate a terrorist act may well be unacceptably high. Thus, studies of terrorist motivation should induce the motivation to improve counterterrorist intelligence and operational capabilities. (See Greenberg, J., Schimel, J., Martens, A., Solomon, S., & Pyszczynski, T. (2001). Sympathy for the devil: Evidence that reminding Whites of their mortality promotes more favorable reactions to White racists. *Motivation & Emotion*, 25, 113-133; Heskin, K. (1994). Terrorism in Ireland: The past and the future. *Irish Journal of Psychology*, 15, 469-479; Meloy, J. R., & McEllistrem, J. E. (1998). Bombing and psychopathy: An integrative review. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 43, 556-562; Miller, B.H. (1984). The language component of terrorism strategy: A text-based, linguistic case study of contemporary German terrorism: I & II. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 44(10-A), 3045; Nielsen, M. E. (2001). Religion's role in the terrorists attack of September 11, 2001. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 3, 377-384.) (Keywords: Motivation, Terrorism.)