PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Is Religious Terrorism More Dangerous? What Have We Learned and How Does It Matter?

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Volume XVIII, Issue 3
September 2024

ISSN: 2334-3745
DOI: 10.19165/2024.2071

Abstract: If religiously inspired terrorism is more lethal than other types of terrorism, then its explanation requires taking into consideration distinctive factors, one of which might be the role of religious ideology. The role of religious ideology in terrorism, however, is much disputed. This article contributes to the debate about the motivational role of religious beliefs and commitments by examining empirical studies of the greater lethality of religious terrorism. A critical synopsis of the findings, which are diverse and scattered throughout the research literature, demonstrates the complexities of the issue and the significance of the cumulative results. Despite some conflicting findings, there is strong evidence of the greater lethality, indicating that religious ideology, in conjunction with two other identified factors (i.e. the use of suicide terrorism and being transnational), accounts for the heightened danger posed by religious terrorism. This conclusion highlights the need to integrate a more fulsome understanding of the religious aspects of religious terrorism into an explanation of what is happening and why than many researchers recognise.

Keywords: Religious terrorism, lethality of terrorism, religious extremism, religion and violence

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Introduction

It is widely assumed that religious terrorism is more dangerous than other forms. Is that assumption warranted? The wave of religious terrorism that emerged in the late twentieth century was often thought to be a new type of terrorism - one that is more lethal than the earlier anarchist, anti-colonial, and new left waves of terrorism.[1] This assumption, however, is rarely based on a sound knowledge of relevant empirical findings, and certainly not in any cumulative sense. This article offers a critical overview of these findings, to see if this assumption is valid, and if so, how this is the case. Testing this seemingly straightforward empirical claim has proved more complex than anticipated, and the results have implications for wider debates about the significance of different ideologies, religious or otherwise, and ideology in general, relative to other factors, in determining the nature of terrorism as a phenomenon.

Scholarly discussions of the seemingly new and preeminent threat posed by religious terrorism began before 9/11,[2] but the shocking events of 9/11 elevated interest in the issue dramatically. Was 9/11 the harbinger of a new tendency in terrorism? Did the religious motivations for this attack account for its ferocity? The questions are distinct yet linked. It was the observed tendency for religious terrorists to engage in more attacks, more indiscriminate attacks, and more lethal ones, that prompted speculation about the heightened threat posed by religious terrorism as a distinctive new type of terrorism.[3] Investigation of this observation led some scholars to explore how the religious aspects of new religious terrorism might account for its greater lethality.[4] Others, more limitedly and empirically, simply sought to test whether religious forms of terrorism are in fact more dangerous.[5] While this study is informed by the former studies, its focus is limited to the latter ones. These studies were undertaken to heighten awareness of a new type of threat. My interest is more specific: to clarify the issue as an unexamined aspect of a larger and ongoing debate about the role of religious motivations in explaining religious terrorism – as discussed below.

Research into whether religious terrorism is more dangerous has been undertaken in diverse ways for more than two decades. While some of the research is well-known, the scattered findings have yet to be critically reviewed.[6] Most of the relevant studies only take into consideration a few other studies and/or examine data from a limited period. Cumulatively, however, what have we learned? Comparing the results of the many different approaches taken to this issue is problematic, yet in the end, the evidence in hand points to a clearer resolution than is commonly appreciated, with implications for explaining the extent to which the religiousness of the terrorism is relevant to explaining any heightened brutality detected, and whether the linkage is direct, indirect, or both.

In explaining the rise, spread and appeal of religious terrorism, many researchers have surprisingly insisted that the religiousness of religious terrorism is not a significant factor. Rather, they argue, the violence in question stems from political,[7] socio-economic, and/or social psychological motivations,[8] and the religious rhetoric of religious terrorists, individually and organisationally, is merely a post hoc justification for their actions. Other terrorism scholars have opposed this strong interpretive tendency. While recognising the multi-factorial nature of the motivations for violent extremism, they argue that failing to recognise the evidentiary value of the religious motivational claims made by religious terrorists, whether individuals or groups, is methodologically unsound and distorts our understanding of the nature of this threat.[9] If the terrorism perpetrated by religious terrorists is demonstrably more lethal than other types of terrorism, then this finding lends credence to the claim that the religious motivations of these terrorists, as individuals or groups, should be treated as a significant factor in the explanation of this phenomenon;[10] and this is the case regardless of how we theorise why extreme religiosity leads to extreme violence.[11]

To be clear, as I have specified elsewhere,[12] the argument is not that the motivations of either individuals or groups involved in religious terrorism are necessarily religious. On the contrary, that must be determined on a case-by-case basis, as must the extent to which religious beliefs and commitments influence specific actions. Further, as stated above, it is recognised that the process of radicalisation involves the complex interaction of multiple variables, and in some instances, people may even engage in religious terrorism for non-religious reasons, or at least initially they might do so.[13] But if individuals and/or groups claim their actions have a religious motivation, and the behaviour of the groups espousing such a motivation are measurably and appreciably different, especially in terms of being more dangerous, then discounting the explanatory significance of the religious ideology is counterproductive, unless specific and strong evidence is provided for minimising its significance. But in most instances, so far, that has not been the case (as reinforced by some of the studies examined below), and as I and others have argued,[14] the reasons commonly given for minimising or even dismissing the relevance of religious motivations for religious terrorism are insufficient in significant ways. Whatever the merits of this argument, however, in this context, I am arguing a simpler supplemental point: if religious forms of terrorism are demonstrably more dangerous, then we should be seeking to pay more systematic theoretical and empirical attention to the role of religious ideologies and motivations, at micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis, to understand what is happening more fully and accurately. Quite surprisingly, however, none of the studies engaged in the debate over the relevance of religious ideologies and motivations have given much consideration to the empirical debate over the relative lethality of religious terrorism in their arguments; an omission this analysis seeks to correct.

There are four parts to the analysis I present. First, I set the initial historical context of the debate by discussing the "new terrorism" debate in terrorism studies. This was a largely theoretical debate that drew attention to the proposition that religious terrorism is more lethal. Second, I deepen the context of the lethality debate by examining some of the descriptive statistics used to support the claim of greater lethality, and highlight certain basic limitations raised by critical commentators. Third, I present an analysis of the most informative studies of the greater lethality in terms of the different factors that researchers have additionally identified as important in understanding this issue, developing analyses that go beyond the mere contrast of data for religious and secular groups. Consideration of these factors adds significant nuance to the debate and points to a few sub-issues in need of further research. Fourth, in the Concluding Remarks, I provide: (i) a more systematic assessment of where things stand; (ii) its implications for treating religious ideology as a significant explanatory variable; and (iii) briefly relate the findings to some theorising about why religious terrorism is more dangerous.

Before proceeding, however, three qualifying comments are in order. First, given the dominance of the threat posed by Islamist terrorism in the post-9/11 era, most of the studies addressed in this review are focused on data about jihadist groups. But, as some of the studies explicitly assert,[15] the increased lethality correlated with a religious rationale for the violence is not limited to any one religious tradition; a view that receives limited but important support from the inclusion of data about Christian forms of terrorism in a recent study.[16] That means, on the one hand, that neither I nor any of the studies examined think the findings are contingent on the Islamist worldview per se. This is the view of most scholars seeking to discern the reasons for religious terrorism as well. That is why they identify aspects of extreme religiosity in general, as found in multiple religious traditions (Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and Sikh), as well as new religious movements like Aum Shinrikyo,[17] to explain what is happening and why religious terrorism is so dangerous.[18] On the other hand, it also means that we need similar studies incorporating more comparable data for the terrorist groups associated with other religious traditions to reach more definitive conclusions about "religious terrorism" per se.

We have excellent scholarship on religious forms of violent extremism in some of these traditions,[19] but the work is largely textual and historical and/or focused on case studies and limited qualitative research. This research, moreover, is usually about religion and violence in general (e.g. inter and intra-religious persecution and sectarian strife) and not terrorism per se. To develop comparable data on the relative lethality of other forms of religious terrorism, new datasets need to be created and analysed. In the contemporary context, nevertheless, historical circumstances have made jihadism the paradigmatic instance of religious terrorism, and logically in this context, and given the limited data available, it remains plausible to draw some inferences about the lethality of religious terrorism, relative to the other non-religious forms of terrorism, based on data about jihadist groups.

Second, in undertaking a review of the empirical findings about the lethality of religious terrorism it must be acknowledged that the studies examined employ an array of similar, different, and complex quantitative methodologies, which cannot be fully documented and assessed in this limited context. Diverse data sources were used, controls were considered, and statistical techniques were employed. Where pertinent, the differences are noted. In this limited context, however, there is little opportunity to engage in a full assessment of the relative reliability of the approaches taken. The studies were all published in reputable journals, so presumably, they were scrutinised by appropriate experts, and the problems raised in this situation are typical of efforts to examine contentious issues with different and incomplete datasets. The use of different methodologies always poses problems for the comparative analysis of results, the focus of this initial review, however, is delineating the similarities and differences in the results obtained to establish what we do know and what we still need to know. Ultimately, the findings may point to the need for initiating an even more sophisticated and standardised methodological approach; doing so, though, goes beyond the purview of this first comprehensive review.

Third, this analysis is not based on any formal systematic method of literature review, such as the approach promoted by the Campbell Collaboration.[20] The studies examined were collected during years of research on aspects of religious terrorism and supplemented through standard bibliographic search techniques. The themes used to organise the analysis were inductively derived from a careful reading and comparison of the studies. Seeking to be thorough, I think the analysis addresses the most pertinent studies available, but some others may have escaped my attention. This situation qualifies the findings, hypothetically, but I doubt that a more formal review process would lead to appreciably different results.

Setting the Context: The New Religious Terrorism Debate

Quantitative studies of the lethality of religious terrorism are historically anchored in an older and wider debate about the emergence of a "new terrorism" in the 1990s and 2000s.[21] In most respects, this debate is no longer directly pertinent to these studies, but some discussion of the new terrorism discussion sets the context for what follows; hence a brief overview is warranted. The transition towards a new form of terrorism was associated with an amorphous set of identifying features,[22] but most discussions focus on a few key shifts in ideology, organisation, and tactics, that are thought to have led to a heightened brutality. The "old terrorism" was largely secular and focused on localised political struggles. The new terrorists are acting on religious ideologies and they have religious goals, which are often radically millennialist or apocalyptic in nature. They are seeking the total transformation of the world, and not just strategic political changes. Past terrorist groups were largely national organisations with a centralised and hierarchical, or vertical, structure (i.e. paramilitary). The new terrorists operate through transnational networks of actors, based on a shared ideological inspiration and personal relationships. The structure of these movements is much looser and more horizontal. The new

terrorists also are much more indiscriminate in who they attack, using suicide missions against soft targets. They are not so much interested in winning over the wider public to their cause, like previous terrorists, as maximising the carnage they inflict to gain even more attention or satisfy symbolically significant religious goals. The grandiose objectives and fanaticism of the new terrorists make them harder to reason with, hindering the capacity to strike the kinds of political compromises that have ended many other campaigns of terror.[23] Consequently, the "new terrorism" is harder to detect and defeat, and it is far more lethal.

There is some scepticism about this "new terrorism" scenario, but most researchers recognise that something changed, qualitatively, with the rise of al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups, especially the Islamic State. There appears to have been an increase in the number, frequency, and lethality of terrorist attacks. In many respects, however, critics have argued that there is as much continuity as change between the old and the new terrorism.[24] The "newer" forms of terrorism have antecedents in the history of terrorism (e.g. Zealot-Sicariis, Anarchists); new and older forms of terrorism have been religious or secular or involved a mixture of these motivations; and many of the organisational changes noted are more evolutionary than revolutionary.[25] Much of the critique, though, misses the mark. As Ersun Kurtulus points out, "the key question is not whether one or another trait of new terrorism occurred before or one or another feature of traditional terrorism still occurs today, but the frequency and scope of that occurrence in each historic period."[26] It may be impossible to resolve the debate over the new terrorism, Kurtulus demonstrates, since "neither the critics nor the proponents define [the] features clearly, precisely and, in a few cases, correctly."[27] Nevertheless, he surmises there is strong evidence that there is something new about contemporary terrorism. "It is religious, networked, and indiscriminate," and strong support for this view comes from the statements and tactics of al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and other jihadist groups. "They not only explicitly declare their purpose to kill civilians and to adopt horizontal networks, but they also go to lengths to justify this novel tactical and organizational approach."[28]

Did these changes lead to a more dangerous form of terrorism? Has the greater lethality of the new religious terrorism been empirically substantiated, and can we establish whether religious beliefs or religious ideologies play a significant role in accounting for this heightened lethality? These are not questions addressed by Kurtulus in his otherwise thorough and telling examination of the arguments advanced for and against the idea of a "new terrorism," yet they logically follow from it.

Deepening the Context: Descriptive Statistics

Basic descriptive statistics seem to suggest strongly that contemporary forms of religious terrorism are very lethal, and for many this evidence has seemed to be sufficient. Some doubts have been raised, however, as discussed in the next section of this analysis.

In their pre-9/11 study on the changing lethality of transnational terrorism over time, Walter Enders and Todd Sandler found "a significant increase in severity" in the casualties inflicted by transnational terrorists in the post-Cold War period.[29] While the number of terrorist incidents decreased dramatically, the attacks became much more lethal, as measured in terms of incidents with injuries and/or deaths, the proportion of incidents with casualties, and incidents with deaths. They also detected, in line with the observations of Hoffman[30] and others, that there was a noticeable "ratcheting up in the severity of attacks" with the onset of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, and then again with the rise of al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups in the 1990s.[31] Consequently, they hypothesise that there was a structural change in casualty statistics, and it was linked with a "shift toward greater religious-based terrorism."[32]

Citing data from the RAND Terrorism Knowledge Base, James Piazza[33] noted that religiously motivated groups had the highest number of victims per attack in the period 1968 to 2005. Compared with "leftist," "rightist," "national-separatist," and "other" groups, "religious" terrorist groups committed the second largest number of attacks, and they had an average casualty rate per attack (wounded or killed) that was higher than "all three of the other types combined."[34] In a later analysis, relying on the data from the Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism database, from 1 January 1998 to 6 August 2007, Romano et al. similarly found that while more terrorist attacks were perpetrated by nationalist groups, "religious and most commonly Islamist terrorist groups produce more fatalities … than all secular nationalist groups combined."[35]

Gary LaFree and Laura Dugan report that thirteen of the twenty deadliest terror groups since 2001 were Islamist.[36] Correlating several of the features of terrorist organisations with levels of lethality, Victor Asal and Karl Rethemeyer found that religious ideology, the size of the group, and the extent of its alliances with other terrorists "all drove up lethality."[37] Other hypothesised factors (e.g. the age of the group, whether it was operating in a democracy, and role of state sponsorship) had no effect. The data they were working with, however, were incomplete and limited to the period 1998-2005.

Overall, then, it appears that attacks by religious terrorists result in more casualties than secular groups, most of the most dangerous groups are religious, and there is some reason to believe that it is the religious ideology that accounts for at least some of this greater lethality.

Deepening the Context: Critical Concerns

Some off-setting data has emerged as well, however, and critics have called attention to several problems that may affect the confidence we can have in these general findings. Some of these concerns have been dealt with, though this is not widely recognised, while others need to receive further attention.

Michael Stohl, for example, notes that data from the US Department of State on international terrorist events shows "no dramatic increase in lethality in the overall series and that 9/11 … is clearly an absolutely horrendous exception to the data series."[38] The relative statistical impact of the 9/11 attacks on results is something that needs to be measured, especially as the data Stohl cites end in 2003. Some later studies take this concern into consideration, but most admittedly do not. Burstein, for example, argues that the results of his analysis of the attacks of religious terrorists between 1970 and 2012 do not change significantly for the post-2000 period, or when he controlled for the impact of the 9/11 attacks.[39] Likewise for Levy.[40] Measuring average lethality rates for terrorist organisations (i.e. the average number of kills per attack per organisation), and not just the raw numbers of kills/casualties or attacks per group, he first excluded "the exceptionally lethal 9/11 attacks from [his] group lethality calculations," then later checked the robustness of his findings by running an additional statistical regression including the 9/11 data. The results, he reports, were similar.[41]

Stohl also argues, citing evidence on the lethality of attacks from the National Terrorism Center Report Series, that "while there is more lethality in the more recent data set [i.e. in the 2009 report], it is most likely that the lethality is due to a focus on the violence of war [, taking into account the terrorist events in Iraq and Afghanistan,] than it is to a change in terrorist tactics."[42] Similarly, Meagan Smith and Sean Zeigler, found, using data from the Global Terrorism Database, that the "… strongest predictor of terrorism within the borders of any given state is the presence of armed conflict, especially for domestic attacks,"[43] and that "terrorism incidents outside of warzones in the post-9/11 era have decreased in absolute terms," especially for "transnational terror incidents."[44] This condition must be considered in analyses of the post-9/11 context, but while the number of attacks, or perhaps even the frequency, may have diminished, the studies

discussed below repeatedly establish that the lethality (number of fatalities) certainly did not. In various ways, many of these additional studies take the significance of the location of attacks into account as well, and they find that this variable has limited relevance in explaining variations in the levels of lethality, relative to other variables.[45]

In addressing the question of the greater lethality of religious terrorism, then, we need to specifically recognise the outsized impact of the 9/11 casualties and those associated with the attacks that followed in the wars fought in Afghanistan and Iraq in response to the 9/11 attacks. These developments have skewed the data somewhat, though the best evidence suggests nowhere near as much as anticipated, either statistically or theoretically (see the more complex analyses discussed in the next section).

Levy raises an additional concern: for a surprisingly high percentage of terrorist incidents, the affiliation of the perpetrators is simply unknown. This fact can impact the accuracy of the results.[46] As with the skewing effect of 9/11, though, some attention has been given to this limitation. Carson and Suppenbach ran analyses of the lethality of jihadism, "with and with out" the unaffiliated incidents, and concluded that the analyses "yielded similar findings."[47]

In the end, as Romano et al. stress, the "[q]ualitative literature on the 'new terrorism' needs the support of quantitative data to ensure that common perceptions are grounded in fact."[48] What, then, does a critical review of the findings from an array of more sophisticated, and hence pertinent, empirical studies reveal about the lethality of religious terrorism?

Deepening the Analysis: Is Religious Terrorism More Lethal?

The findings of other studies have, in diverse ways, supported the base finding that religious terrorism is indeed more lethal. But they have added important nuance to the argument by identifying different specific factors that they think explain this greater lethality. Therefore, they reveal that the situation is more complicated than it seems, but because the studies are scattered and tend to reference only a few of the others, we lack a sufficiently systematic grasp of the situation and the state of our knowledge. To bring more order to the diverse findings, I first sort them by the six alternative key factors that the authors think should be taken into consideration to understand the greater lethality of religious terrorism. The analysis allows us to grasp a better sense of the overall record of research, what really matters, and the implications.

We Need to Consider the Different Types of Religious Terrorist Groups

Piazza argues that a closer analysis of the data indicates that not all jihadist groups are more deadly.[49] Using global data and a case study of terrorist attacks in Iraq between 1998 and 2005, he demonstrates that it is only Islamist groups affiliated with the al-Qaeda network that are more lethal. In doing so, of course, he partially addresses the concerns raised about the skewing effect of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan on the data about religious terrorism. Differentiating between "universal/abstract" groups like al-Qaeda and "strategic" groups like Hamas, Piazza finds that the former is more likely to commit high-casualty terrorist attacks than other terrorist groups.[50] In fact, al-Qaeda affiliated groups "perpetrate significantly more lethal attacks and are responsible for a disproportionate number of attacks and total casualties per group."[51] In Iraq, for example, "while accounting for only one-third of all attacks by Islamist groups, al-Qaeda groups were responsible for 95.9% of all casualties due to Islamist terrorism, and attacks by al-Qaeda affiliates resulted in four times the number of casualties per attack than non-al-Qaeda groups."[52] "The primary difference," Piazza stipulates, "between universal abstract groups and

strategic groups is the former are distinguished by highly ambitious, abstract, complex, and nebulous goals that are driven primarily by ideology." This orientation results, he argues, in "critical organizational and goal structure differences that determine the tactical behavior" of the groups, like "whether or not they use suicide attacks, whether or not they attack soft targets, and whether or not they are inhibited about attacking members of their same nationality or religious community." These are the behaviours, he reasons, that determine the lethality of their attacks.[53]

Graig Klein builds on and modifies this conclusion.[54] Shifting the key explanatory variables, some control variables, and the unit of analysis in some of the models run with Piazza's data, he argues it is the transnational character of the attacks that is most consequential in explaining the higher lethality, rather than the Islamist ideology per se. Transnational Islamist attacks have the largest casualty counts by far, but all transnational attacks have significantly higher casualty counts. So, he seeks to demonstrate, what matters most is not the more universal goal structure of certain Islamist groups, like al-Qaeda, but the orientation of transnational groups "to attacking outside [their] recruitment audience."[55] Organisations focused on domestic terrorism must exercise more restraint, since higher levels of collateral deaths and injuries generate a backlash effect curtailing future recruitment from this environment. This hypothesis, while plausible, has yet to be tested with other data, with the partial exception of Levy.[56] Levy factors the number of transnational attacks into his analysis and notes a correlation with some statistical significance with higher levels of lethality. But both his findings and Klein's still indicate a strong link between the jihadist ideology and greater lethality, and one which may be more explanatorily significant (as discussed further in the conclusion). The linkage, however, may be more indirect, or multi-faceted, than commonly envisaged.

We Need to Consider the Use of Suicide Terrorism

Others suggest that the key factor in accounting for the greater lethality of religious terrorism is the use of suicide attacks, more than the religiousness of the group per se. As might be expected, the data reveals that this variable is strongly correlated with higher lethality. Using data from the International Policy Institute's "Terror Attack Data Base," from 1 January 1980 to 1 January 2002, for instance, Mathew Capell and Emile Sahliyeh conclude:

> *Our research offers evidence that there is more to the story of this "New Terrorism's" lethality than the type of groups involved. While it supports Bruce Hoffman's hypotheses that religious groups do have a significant effect on the number of terrorist-related fatalities, including indiscriminate attacks leading to higher numbers of civilian casualties, it offers, on the other hand, considerable support for our hypothesis that the use of suicide terrorism as a tactic is highly significant in explaining the increase in ... lethality.*[57]

Suicide terrorism may be a key factor in explaining the higher lethality of jihadists. As Levy notes, years after Capell and Sahliyeh's analysis, "almost 70 percent of the sampled groups that use suicide terrorism are jihadist,"[58] and the "groups that use suicide terrorism kill and wound over 100 percent more than do groups that do not use it."[59] When this information is coupled with the fact that "jihadist groups perform almost 80 percent fewer attacks than non-jihadist groups," then it appears that it is the greater efficiency of the attacks by jihadists, and not the volume, that accounts for their higher lethality.[60] Nonetheless, as we will see, Levy still places a stronger onus on the role of religious ideology in accounting for the increased lethality, a view supported by the analysis undertaken by Peter Henne.[61]

Like Piazza and others, Henne finds that the data suggests terrorist attacks motivated by a religious ideology are significantly more lethal, compared to those driven by nationalism, socio-political repression, or economic deprivation. But he focuses more narrowly on one form

of terrorist violence, suicide attacks between 1980 and 2006. The preference for this tactic may constitute a key mediating variable in accounting for the heightened lethality of religious terrorism, but it does not displace religious motivations in explaining the greater lethality.

Analysing data on suicide attacks between 1980 and 2006, compiled by Phillip Kapusta for a project conducted at the US Army's School of Advanced Military Studies, and controlling for several pertinent variables, he demonstrates that it is the religious groups, amongst those using suicide attacks, that are the most lethal. Therefore, he concludes:

> *These findings show strong support for the theorized effect of religious ideology on terrorist violence. Groups with religious ideologies cause more deaths through suicide bombings than nationalist and leftist groups. This relationship holds in conditions of varying political freedom, economic development, ethnic fractionalization, and military occupation. Studies of suicide terrorism that ignore – or attempt to downplay – the importance of religion in groups' actions will therefore be incomplete, and possibly misleading.*[62]

Seeking to better specify the way religion is relevant, he further found that the mere presence of Muslims in a terrorist group has no effect on the level of suicide attacks. Specific religious traditions, then, are not the cause of increased violence. It is the presence of religious motivations, from any tradition, that intensifies the violence. Echoing Piazza in some respects, he argues that everything depends on how religion contributes to the framing of the violence. Political violence framed by a religious ideology "can lead to combatants perceiving their struggle as a sacred one and becoming disassociated from local factors."[63] Contradicting Piazza, however, Henne thinks his data shows that the specific organisational structure or goals of the groups are irrelevant. Whether the group is "ethnoreligious" or "fundamentalist," partially analogue to Piazza's "strategic" and "universal/abstract" groups, has little influence on the severity of the violence. His analysis indicates that it is the presence of a religious ideology that "influences the behavior of terrorist groups even when the differing nature of the groups [is] accounted for."[64]

We Need to Consider the Degrees of Religiosity

Alon Burstein builds, in effect, on these insights by arguing that "the more religious components are found in a terror group's ideology, the more violent and deadly its actions tend to be."[65] Replacing the simple dichotomy of secular and religious groups found in the new terrorism debate with a continuum of degrees of secularity and religiosity, he tests if secular and religious groups use different tactics, if religious groups engage in more attacks, and if their attacks are more deadly. He did so with data on 3,000 terrorist organisations, for the period 1970–2012, drawn from multiple sources: the Global Terrorism Database, the Terrorist Organisation Profiles database, the Big Allied and Dangerous database, the Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium database, the US State Department "Patterns of Global Terrorism" reports, and various founding texts and statements by the terrorist groups. In each way, he concludes, the increased presence of religion in the ideology leads to more violence and fatalities. His analysis further reveals that "the results are not isolated to a specific region or religion," and they do not change significantly for activities only measured after the year 2000, or when the impact of the 9/11 attacks is controlled for.[66]

A similar conclusion is reached by Brittnee Carter, Ranya Ahmed, Cagil Albayrak and Maya van Nuys.[67] Using a dataset of 198 terrorist groups categorised as religious and controlling for a wide variety of organisational characteristics of the groups and of the environment in which they operate, they undertook a comparative analysis of religious and secular groups, but also Islamist and Christian terrorist groups. Overall, they too found that the religious groups were more lethal. Both terrorist groups motivated by Christian fundamentalism and Islamist groups

are "more likely to attack civilian targets than any other target." Christian groups are "most likely to use assassination as a primary tactic," while Islamist ones are "more likely to use armed assault than any other tactic" – but also bombings and hijackings.[68]

As for the rate of casualties from their attacks, both Islamist and Christian groups have markedly higher rates, but it is the Christian groups that are the most lethal. Directly comparing the two groups with a statistical model reveals that "Islamist terrorist attacks can expect an increased rate of casualties of 1.70 times the rate of non-Islamist groups, while the rate ratio of casualties of Christian fundamentalist groups is over 3.3 times that of non-Christian terrorist groups."[69] Consequently, they argue, researchers and counter-terrorism practitioners must carefully consider how ideology, and especially specific religious ideologies, "can set the diagnostic, motivational, and prognostic frames that drive a group's decisions making, leading them toward specific behaviour to achieve specific ends."[70] Ideology is only one of multiple relevant contextual and motivating factors, but it is critical, and as their study indicates, differences in ideology, or at least religious ideologies, matter.

Ido Levy arrives at a similar conclusion. After providing one of the most comprehensive analyses of the issue, he argues that groups espousing a jihadist ideology are more lethal, and further that jihadist groups espousing a more intense ideology are more lethal than those with less intense ideologies.[71] His overall objective is to establish that "greater ideological intensity increases terrorist organization lethality."[72] Whatever the merits of this argument,[73] here the focus is the more direct and limited initial question of whether jihadism is more lethal. Using data from the GTD from 1970 to 2017, he demonstrates that "jihadist groups are approximately 41 percent – 77 percent more lethal than non-jihadist groups."[74] The statistical model he uses to derive this finding takes into consideration numerous organisational and country controls. Many of the organisational control variables are ones that other studies have linked to increased terrorist lethality: the age of the group, the extent of its network ties, if there is state sponsorship, the number of transnational attacks, and whether suicide bombings are used.[75] The underlying premise of the first three variables is that more established and stronger organisations, with networks of support, will have "more opportunities to accumulate skill and increase lethality."[76] To this, he adds Klein's argument that "groups that conduct transnational attacks have more liberty to act and kill since they are less concerned with impressing a local audience."[77] While calculating the use and number of suicide attacks accounts for the common suspicion that it is this tactic that primarily explains the higher rates of lethality, whether the groups are religious (e.g. Islamic State) or secular (e.g. the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka).

In the various statistical models run, some evidence emerged that the extent of network ties and state sponsorship were statistically significant, to a degree in determining levels of lethality (in line with Asal and Rethemeyer[78]). But the level of significance in the first instance is low, and the number of sponsors is limited for most groups, so Levy concludes: "… while sponsors may serve as force multipliers for terrorist lethality, ideology is a more substantial determinant of lethality."[79] The use of suicide terrorism is consequential as well. But the question now pivots somewhat to: What accounts for the higher use of suicide attacks by jihadist groups? Curiously, though, Levy does not actually pose this question. He is content to note a jihadist "affinity" for this modus operandi, but he does not explore its nature.[80] Is there a significant ideological, or even more specifically a religious, reason for the marked preference of jihadist groups for this mode of attack and the consequent higher casualty rate?

We Need to Consider the Call to Action Issued by the Islamic State

Using data from the Global Terrorism Database for the period 1994-2014, Jennifer Carson and Matthew Suppenbach[81] also found a strong nexus of religious ideology and lethality, with regard at least to the jihadists. The "Global Jihadist Movement," they conclude, "has a distinct ability to

kill and maim civilians." "[T]he odds of an incident causing death is over 3 times more probable when tied to the [Global Jihadist Movement]"[82] and "al Qa'ida alone has averaged 63.2 deaths per incident, which is a 761% higher average than the next group."[83] This and other findings lead them to conclude that jihadism had become a dominant and distinct "manifestation of terrorism," even though it was not necessarily the most "frequent" one nor displayed "a distinctive targeting strategy."[84] The strong preference for suicide attacks, they too note, also contributed to the heightened lethality.

They go a step further, however, by also suggesting we consider the influence of an additional specific mechanism driving the lethality; a factor which happened too late to be considered by most of the other studies.[85] In September 2014, the external operations emir of the Islamic State (IS), Muhammad al-Adnani, called on the supporters of IS in the West to carry out attacks in their countries. Speaking two months after the establishment of the new Caliphate, he issued the following call: "If you can kill a disbelieving American or European – especially the spiteful and filthy French – or an Australian, or a Canadian … kill him in any manner or way however it may be. Do not ask for anyone's advice and do not seek anyone's verdict."[86] The message was repeated on at least three subsequent occasions, providing more specific instructions on how to kill Westerners.[87] The data shows that this call was remarkably successful in encouraging unaffiliated IS sympathisers to plot and launch attacks; attacks that peaked in Europe, North America, and Australia in the following years.[88] Factoring this development into the findings further demonstrates the power of the connection between religious terrorism, and ideology in general, and increased violence and lethality.

Carson and Suppenbach's own data, however, only extends to 2014. It does not capture the full extent of the surge in IS planned and inspired attacks, as reflected by the shootings, suicide bombings, and vehicular attacks that occurred, for example, in Paris (Nov. 2015), San Bernardino (Dec. 2015), Brussels (Mar. 2016), Orlando (June 2016), Nice (July 2016), Berlin (Dec. 2016), Stockholm (April 2017), London (Mar. 2017, June 2017, and Nov. 2019), Manchester (May 2017), and Barcelona (August 2017).

We Need to Consider the Influence of State Sponsorship on the Lethality of Religious Terrorism

Building on possibilities and gaps in the existing research, Brittnee Carter examines data from the Global Terrorism Database and the Big, Allied, and Dangerous 2.0 dataset on "more than 2,500 attacks from nearly 140 … terrorist, militant, and insurgent groups"[89] to investigate what conditions foster the increased targeting of civilians, giving rise in turn to higher levels of lethality. She differentiates and compares data on groups she categorises as "Religiously Motivated (Only)," State Sponsored (Only)," "Religiously Motivated & Sate Sponsored," and "Other." Her hypothesis is that "the potential missing link in the theoretical and empirical studies of religiously motivated terrorism and target selection is the impact of group resources and support in the form of state sponsorship."[90]

Her analysis reveals three things. First, as anticipated by many, "religiously motivated terrorism is positively associated with civilian attacks with an increased odds (sic) of 4.30."[91] Second, contrary to what some expect, her analysis does not provide "enough information" to support a positive correlation between state sponsorship and the increased likelihood of targeting civilians.[92] Third, her results demonstrate there is a positive and significant "interaction effect" between religious motivation and state sponsorship: "violent religiously motivated groups that are state-sponsored are more likely than secular non-sponsored groups, religious non-sponsored groups, or secular sponsored groups to carry out civilian attacks,"[93] and "do so at much higher rates."[94] [95]

Why might this be the case? Carter offers several possible reasons, such as state sponsorship makes it easier for such groups to stay focused and pursue their activities by providing financing, weapons, and sanctuary, and allowing them to engage in indiscriminate attacks without concern about the loss of popular support.[96] This is plausible, but her discussion is largely speculative, as is her analysis of why states may particularly wish to sponsor religiously motivated groups. Overall, though, everything rests on the finding that religiously motivated groups are more inclined to target civilians in the first place. It is the religious ideology that condones and incentivises the indiscriminate targeting of civilians – of unbelievers, broadly defined - that is the primary factor for 69.3 percent of her sample (combining the "Religiously Motivated" at 43 percent with the "Religiously Motivated and State Sponsored" at 26.3 percent). State sponsorship, she notes, "may only exacerbate" this pre-existing reason for greater lethality.[97]

We Need to Consider What We Mean by the Increased 'Brutality' of the Religious Terrorists

Finally, one study stands out as being at odds with the others. Aiming for greater specificity about what is happening and why, Sebastian Jäckle and Marcel Baumann[98] chose to operationalise the "brutalisation" thesis (as they call it) of the new terrorism argument in nine different ways: (1) as more terrorist attacks; (2) as more fatalities due to terrorist attacks; (3) as more fatalities per terrorist attack; (4) as more suicide attacks; (5) as more attacks against soft targets; (6) as more fatalities due to terrorist attacks against soft targets; (7) as the average number of fatalities due to terrorist attacks against soft targets; (8) as more suicide attacks against soft targets; (9) and as more beheadings. Examining data from the Global Terrorism Database, from 1970 to 2011, they arrived at a more qualified conclusion:

> *First, we find no strong and definitive trend within most of our indicators that would justify speaking of a general trend towards brutalization. Yet there are some hints that there is indeed some brutalization going on. We have to differentiate between a certain general brutalization that has started in the early 1990s (particularly with regard to the average number of fatalities), albeit interrupted by periods of relative "terrorist tranquillity," and a brutalization in terms of qualitative changes in the form of killings, which is very much related to the logic of maximizing public and media attention. This second form of brutalization started in the late 1990s and has been particularly strong since the mid-2000s.*[99]

While acknowledging some increase in the levels of lethality, then, in contrast with most of the other studies, they suggest it is far less substantial. They only analyse data from one source, however, and up to 2011. Consequently, they are not considering data from one of the most brutal periods of jihadist terrorism, namely the post-2014 attacks perpetrated or inspired by the Islamic State. They also argue, though, that there is a measurable increase in the preference for more brutal styles of attacks, providing a different kind of qualified support for the new terrorism thesis, a trend heightened by the onset of the Islamic State. As the focus of their study is the new terrorism debate, no attempt is made to explain away the conflicting evidence on the levels of lethality detected by Piazza, Henne, and others. In fact, these studies are not even cited by them, and further consideration would now have to be given to the conflicting findings, derived from study of the Global Terrorism Database as well, provided by Carson et al. and Levy.[100, 101]

Concluding Remarks

Debatable differences in the approaches taken by these studies lead to somewhat different results, but overall, the data provides strong support for the claims made about the unique

dangers posed by religious terrorism. In fact, the research demonstrates that the attacks perpetrated by religious terrorists, at least Christian and Islamist ones, are, on average, many times more deadly than those by other groups, though studies differ by how much. To arrive at a more definitive conclusion, we would need to additionally pay more critical attention to the comparative analysis of the various quantitative methods used in these studies and acquire more comparable data for religious terrorists from other faiths.

The findings are impacted as well by other limitations with the datasets used that are highlighted by Romano et al. and "bedevil virtually all statistical analyses of terrorism," and not just this issue.[102] First, citing Martha Crenshaw,[103] Ramano et al. note classification issues in many of the databases on which the analyses rely.[104] It is not always clear which groups have been designated as "religious" or why, or how we should deal with data on various types of "hybrid" groups, like Hezbollah and Hamas. They are defined as being both religious and national-separatist.[105] Second, Romano et al. point out that most of the "well-received" statistical studies of terrorism simply "do not provide a breakdown of which kinds of groups account for how much terrorism.[106] Third, most datasets rely on "Western press accounts as their primary data source" and "this means that while almost 100% of deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan are counted, very few of those in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo get counted, since international media tend not to pay as much attention to states like the DRC."[107] Levy notes this limitation as well, extending the scope to include data on the Middle East, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa, since the media coverage there is probably far less comprehensive than in the Western or developed world.[108] Similarly, Carson and Suppenbach note that the emergence of newer communication technologies could also have skewed the data because of increased coverage of more recent incidents.[109] Fourth and finally, as Ramono et al. state, if the datasets "stretched back to the African liberation and civil wars of the 1960s-80s, the trends would probably look dramatically different (with the more relative weighting of secular nationalist and Leftist terrorist groups)." Likewise, if all the datasets included the period in which the Islamic State (ISIS) exacted a "grisly death toll," the results would skew more heavily towards Islamist religious groups.[110] So much depends on the geographic and temporal coverage of the datasets used in different analyses.[111]

The impact of each of these limitations is hard to gauge, and the issues raised exceed the bounds of this initial assessment of the studies on lethality. Nevertheless, the existing findings lend credence to the claim that religious terrorism is distinctive, and hence its explanation necessitates calling on ideas not typically used to explain other types of terrorism. Certainly, the crucial role of differences in ideology comes to the fore. It remains a somewhat more open question, however, whether this, in turn, means that religious ideology per se is the key additional factor. As we have seen, various confounding factors were initially identified that may have a skewing effect on the findings of studies of the greater lethality of religious terrorism (i.e. the impact of the 9/11 data, the unknown affiliation of the perpetrators of many attacks, and whether the attacks happened in war zones). Later studies, taking these factors into consideration in various ways, found the effects were minimal. Two other factors, though, appear to have a more direct and telling effect: the use of suicide terrorism and engaging in transnational terrorism. A third factor, state sponsorship, may also play an aggravating role, though less significantly. However, none seem adequate, on their own or in combination, to explain the heightened lethality of religious terrorism except in combination with the effects of being motivated by a religious ideology.

Much of the heightened lethality detected probably stems from the brutal effectiveness of suicide attacks, though even this supposition is also subject to some empirical dispute.[112] The heightened effectiveness of this attack modality may explain the preference for its use under certain circumstances, such as when other options have been effectively suppressed, or groups lack the resources to do otherwise (e.g. in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict or that between Sri

Lankan Tamils and their government). Are these circumstances sufficient, however, to explain this tactical preference? This question raises another old and complex debate about the relative significance of ideology, that is too complex to resolve here.[113] Given the irrefutably strong preference of jihadists for this tactic, however, there is good reason to think that ideology plays a causal role in the resultant greater danger. Moreover, as Henne demonstrates, when religious groups revert to suicide terrorism, they are more lethal than secular groups, and as Burnstein argues, there is a strong correlation between the degree of religiosity of the motivating ideology and the relative lethality of the attacks perpetrated.[114]

The other factor associated with the greater lethality is the tactical consequences of engaging in transnational as opposed to more limited domestic forms of terrorism.[115] Once again, though, it is the jihadists that have been most strikingly transnational (i.e. al-Qaeda and ISIS). Why might this be the case? The transnational focus would seem to be inextricably linked with ideological considerations. Both Piazza and Levy argue that the evidence suggests that the influence of a religious motivating ideology remains the predominant background factor, rather than the independent effect of the strategic choice to be transnational.[116] This conclusion is reinforced by the finding that Christian groups are even more lethal than the jihadists, since few Christian terrorists could be classified as transnational.[117] The outsized impact of the call to arms issued by the Islamic State in 2014 is indicative of the crucial role of ideology as well.

While state sponsorship seems to heighten the potential lethality of religious terrorists, Carter is clear that it is the prior, ideologically determined, willingness to launch indiscriminate attacks on civilians that is more consequential, and her discussion demonstrates that it is difficult at this time to really know how, why, and to what extent state sponsorship makes a difference.[118]

The use of suicide attacks or having a transnational focus, then, are the two most significant factors to further consider in thinking about what makes religious terrorists more dangerous, but it is the jihadists that have demonstrated a more pronounced preference for these modalities. Why might this be the case? Implicit in the literature is the suggestion that it is the universalising and transcendentalising features of their religious worldview that offer a plausible common denominator for the explanation of both developments, and hence the greater lethality of religious terrorism. The limited evidence in hand, however, indicates that there is nothing inevitable about the connection between the greater use of suicide terrorism, being transnational, and religious terrorism per se.

The discussion of these two factors largely just returns us to the original debate about the relevance of religious ideologies, but with a bit more specificity. To resolve matters we would need to prove whether the choice of this attack modality and/or this orientation stemmed from the influence of religious or non-religious factors. Did they result from strategic or ideological considerations, or both, and to what degree? Some may question, however, how relevant this way of thinking, with its dependence on a strong distinction between strategic and ideological modes of thought, is to the analysis of religious terrorism. Do religious extremists, who are usually radical fundamentalists, engage in one without the other?

Alternatively, as Kurtulus stresses, we need to keep in mind that what is new and most worrisome is not just the sheer lethality of the new terrorism but "the deliberately indiscriminate nature of the terrorist attacks – regardless of the capabilities to do so." The key factor is the "intention and strategy … of terrorist organisations to cause such large number of casualties," and the efforts jihadists have taken to explicitly legitimise the indiscriminate targeting of civilians on a moral and religious basis.[119] Carter's analysis pivots on this same point – the willingness to target civilians indiscriminately.[120] In other words, the issue is the ideological motivation and justification for the violence and not just the tactics or means used, or the national versus transnational orientation of the groups. The question then becomes whether there is an affinity

between a certain type of religious worldview and being so ready to inflict large numbers of civilian casualties. While clearly, there is a strong link to intolerant sectarian extremism in general,[121] many scholars have pointed more specifically to an additional factor: the adoption of an apocalyptic and/or millennialist understanding of a group's mission.[122] Is this something shared by Christian and Islamist forms of religious terrorists, and what about other types?

The various analyses linking the new terrorism to religious motivations call upon aspects of the apocalyptic worldview and mindset to account for the heightened violence, ranging from the radicalising impact of dividing the world into categories of absolute good and evil, through the consequent easy dehumanisation of one's enemies, to the antinomian tendencies of thinking one is engaged in a cosmic war during the end of days. Explication of these and other possible linkages exceeds the purpose of this study, but to reiterate, establishing the greater lethality of religious terrorism undergirds the explanatory value of such theorising, and the importance of empirically augmenting these arguments with research into the operative nature and effects of the religious motivations espoused by religious terrorists. Those theorising about this situation have considered textual and qualitative findings from a range of different religious traditions, Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and new religious movements, but as demonstrated, except for some limited consideration of data on the greater lethality of Christian groups, we lack comparable data on the terrorist groups identified with the other religious traditions.[123]

Focusing for now on the group for which we have the most evidence, jihadists have used at least three interrelated lines of argument to legitimise targeting civilians. First, there is a doctrine of proportionate response. Attacks by jihadists in the West are an appropriate response to the many Muslim civilians killed by infidels in the wars waged by Western governments against supposed terrorism in Muslim lands. Second, civilians in the West are legitimate targets because of the support they offer to the democratic governments waging these wars in Muslim lands, and the support these governments provide to apostate oppressive regimes in many Muslim countries. Third, these oppressive regimes and their followers, and the many Muslims opposed to waging jihad, are fair game because they have forfeited the protections normally accorded fellow Muslims. They are no longer "true Muslims."[124] In each instance the key variable is an extremist interpretation and enactment of religious identity. Not just any identity, but a religiously conceived one. Not just an ethno-nationalist identity anchored in the negotiable realities of this world, but a world-transcending identity, in terms of space and time, that is conceptually wedded to an ancient prioritisation of the pursuit of radical purity of purpose and being, both for the defenders of God and the world He created.[125] There is nothing uniquely Islamic about the focus on such idealised religious identity goals, and the concomitant call to self and world transformation.[126] But for a host of reasons (e.g. the ongoing consequences of colonialism and globalisation) violent Islamists are the most prominent contemporary manifestation of this religio-historic tendency.[127, 128]

What have been the consequences of the introduction of religious motives into modern terrorism? The answer to this question is pertinent to discerning the broader relationship between religion and violence, but it has its own chilling significance as well. Given the various limitations of the datasets available, the need to subject the methodologies of the studies reviewed to greater scrutiny, and to secure more data about the lethality of other forms of religious terrorism, a fully comprehensive answer is not possible at this time. We can say with confidence, however, that significantly more people die at the hands of Christian and Islamist religious terrorists than any other terrorists, and this fact alone establishes an imperative to integrate a more fulsome and sophisticated understanding of the ways people order their lives (and deaths) through their religious beliefs and commitments into the study of "religious terrorism." To this end, we need to start by paying more serious attention to the evidentiary value of the religious motivational claims made by religious terrorists, individuals and groups, no matter how fanciful or alien these professions may appear to us.

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Acknowledgements: I wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments, which led to improvements in the article.

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47 Jennifer Varriale Carson and Matthew Suppenbach, "The Global Jihadist Movement: The Most Lethal Ideology*?" Homicide Studies* 22, No. 1 (2018): 23.

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58 Levy, Lethal Beliefs, 2023, 819.

59 Ibid, 819.

60 Ibid., 819.

61 Henne, Ancient Fire, 2012.

62 Ibid., 52.

63 Ibid., 39.

64 Ibid., 53.

65 Burnstein, Armies of God, 2018, 14.

66 Ibid., 14.

67 Carter et al., Disaggregating Religiously Motivated Terrorism, 2023.

68 Ibid., 81-82.

69 Ibid., 83.

70 Ibid., 89.

71 Levy, Lethal Beliefs, 2023, 816.

72 Ibid., 811.

73 Levy argues that greater ideological intensity encourages greater terrorist lethality for three reasons: (1) the espousal of more abstract and less attainable goals reduces the likelihood of negotiations and heightens the willingness to be more brutal in local contexts; (2) more intense ideologies promote stronger group cohesion, which facilitates the retention of members while perpetrating horrible acts; and (3) more abstract ideologies facilitate the networking that assists with exchanges of information, weapons, and operational support (Levy, Lethal Beliefs, 2023, 811-812). He then uses jihadism in general as an indicator of ideological intensity (Levy, Lethal Beliefs, 2023, 817) and seeks to measure the relative intensity of jihadist groups by aligning the data on the lethality of attacks with a typology of jihadist groups, identifying "Local" groups as the least intense and "Apocalyptic" as the most (with "Revolutionary" and "Caliphal" types between). The adequacy of his overall approach and reasoning, for example whether it escapes a certain circularity and sufficiently differentiates being more "ideologically intense" from merely being "transnational," is debatable. These and other problems, however, do not impact his calculations of the increased lethality of jihadism overall, relative to other types of terrorism, using a more comprehensive dataset than attempted before.

74 Ibid., 819.

75 For example, Capell and Sahliyeh, Suicide Terrorism, 2007; Asal and Rethemeyer, The Nature of the Beast, 2008; Henne, Ancient Fire, 2012; Klein, Ideology Isn't Everything, 2016.

76 Levy, Lethal Beliefs, 2023, 818.

77 Ibid., 818.

78 Asal and Rethemeyer, The Nature of the Beast, 2008.

79 Levy, Lethal Beliefs, 2023, 819.

80 Ibid., 822.

81 Carson and Suppenbach, "Global Jihadist Movement" 2018.

82 Ibid., 18.

83 Ibid., 22.

84 Ibid., 19 and 22.

85 Ibid., 22.

86 Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser, "Assessing the Islamic State's Commitment to Attacking the West," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, No. 4 (2015), 4.

87 Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen, and Emilie Oftedal, "Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, No. 6 (2016), 5.

88 Ibid.; Shandon Harris-Hogan, Lorne L. Dawson, and Amarnath Amarasingam, "A Comparative Analysis of the Nature and Evolution of the Domestic Jihadist Threat to Australia and Canada (2000–2020)," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, No. 5 (2020): 77-102.

89 Britnee Carter, "When Civilians are Targets: The Fatal Effects of State Sponsored Religiously Motivated Terrorism," *Democracy and Security* 18, No. 1 (2022): 35-36.

90 Ibid, 31.

91 Ibid, 38.

92 Ibid, 39-40; This is in line with the earlier findings of Asal and Rethemeyer, Nature of the Beats, 2008.

93Ibid., 40.

94 Ibid, 43.

95 To a lesser extent there also is a positive and significant correlation with "the age of the group, the regime type of the state [targeted], and the presence of ethnic conflict" for both religiously motivated groups and state-sponsored groups (2022: 38).

96 Ibid., 33.

97 Ibid., 33.

98 Sebastian Jäckle and Marcel Baumann, "New Terrorism = Higher Brutality? An Empirical Test of the "Brutalization Thesis," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, No. 5 (2017): 875-901.

99 Ibid., 898.

100 Carter et al., Disaggregating Religiously Motivated Terrorism, 2023; Levy, Lethal Beliefs, 2023.

101 A more fulsome and direct comparison of their methodologies and findings with those of Piazza, Henne, Carson & Suppenbach, and Levy to resolve this anomalous situation would be ideal but exceeds the limits of this review.

102 Romano et al., Correlates of Terror, 2019.

103 Crenshaw, Old vs New, 2011, 61.

104 Romano et al., Correlates of Terror, 2019, 5.

105 Kurtulus (2011: 488), however, questions whether this is a problem. He questions the way some researchers argue that groups like Hamas and Hezbullah are more political than religious. He notes the intrinsically territorial and communal nature of Sunni and Shi'a Islam, both normatively and historically, and the renewed emphasis placed on solidarity with the umma amongst contemporary Islamists, and then suggests the researchers calling into question the religiousness of such "hybrid" groups are relying on a distinction between religion and politics that is foreign to Islam. In considering these "hybrid" groups, he insists, much depends on the stated objectives of the groups. While in some instances Islam is being used to mobilize people for nation building, a relatively secular objective, in other instances, where the aim is establishing a theocratic order, the objective is decidedly anti-secular. The mere mixing of politics, territoriality, and religion, tells us little, and overall, it is common and orthodox for the latter (i.e. religion) to encompass the former.

106 Romano et al., Correlates of Terror, 2019, 7. The studies they cite are: A. Abadi, "Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism." Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research (2004); J.J. Andreas Freytag, D.M. Kruger, & F. Schneider, "The Origins of Terrorism: Cross Country Estimates on Socio-Economic Determinants of Terrorism." Economic of Security Working Paper Series (2010); A. Basuchoudhary & W.F. Shughart, "On Ethnic Conflict and the Origins of Terrorism," *Defence and Peace Economics* 21, No. 1 (2010): 65-87; G. S. Bird, B. Blomberg & G. D. Hess, "International Terrorism: Causes, Consequences, and Cures," *The World Economy* 31, No. 2 (2008): 255-274; B. Burgoon, "On Welfare and Terror: Social Welfare Policies and Political-Economic Roots of Terrorism," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, No. 2 (2006): 176-203; N. F. Campos & M. Gassebner, "International Terrorism, Political Instability, and the Escalation Effect." Institute for the Study of Labor, 2009, http://ftp.iza.org/dp4061.pdf; A. Dreher & M. Gassebner, "Does Political Proximity to the U. S. Cause Terror?" *Economics Letters* 99, No. 1 (2008): 27-29; T. Krieger & D. Meierrieks, "Terrorism in the Worlds of Welfare Capitalism," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54 No. 6 (2010): 902-939; A. B. Kruger, *What Makes a Terrorist: Economics and the Roots of Terrorism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); A. B. Kruger, "Kto Kogo?: A Cross-Country Study of the Origins and Targets of Terrorism," in *Terrorism, Economic Development, and Political Openness*, eds. P. Keefer & N. Layaza (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 148-173; J. A. Piazza, "Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism?" *International Studies Quarterly* 52, No. 3 (2008): 469-488.

107 Ibid., 7.

108 Levy, Lethal Beliefs, 2023, 816.

109 Carson and Suppenbach, "Global Jihadist Movement" 2018, 23.

110 Romano et al., Correlates of Terror, 2019, 7.

111 There is an additional serious problem that also cannot be addressed adequately in this limited context: most analyses of religious terrorism, including those examining its lethality, never bother to define it, so implicitly we may be comparing somewhat different phenomena. In his famous essay in "Modern Terror: The Four Waves," (in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, eds. A. Cronin and J. Ludes (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 46-74) David Rapoport differentiates the wave of religious terrorism from the three earlier waves of modern and secular terrorism, for example, by their use of sacred texts and historic examples to legitimate violence. Even more sweepingly, Mark

Juergensmeyer proposes that acts of terrorism "for which religion … provide[s] the motivation, the justification, the organization, and the world view" are religious terrorism (Juergensmeyer, *Mind of God,* 2003, 7). Alternatively, Heather Gregg argues that what makes religiously motivated terrorism unique is not just "the presence of scripture, religious symbols or adherents," but the goals they are fighting for, and she specifies three: "fomenting the apocalypse, creating a religious government, and religiously cleansing a state or area" (Gregg, Path to Salvation, 2014, 39). Few of these approaches, however, also specify what they mean by religion. This is quite typical of research on religion and terrorism, and it crucially limits the functionality of many discussions of religious terrorism. For my overall conceptions of religion see Lorne L. Dawson and Joel Thiessen, *The Sociology of Religion: A Canadian Perspective* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2014); but my most precise definition of religion is delineated in Lorne L. Dawson, "On References to the Transcendent in the Scientific Study of Religion: A Qualified Idealist Proposal," *Religion* 17, No. 4 (1987): 227-250.

112 For example, Burcu Pinar Alakoc, "When Suicide Kills: An Empirical Analysis of the Lethality of Suicide Terrorism," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 11, No. 8 (2017): 1-15; Marco Nilsson, "Hard and Soft Targets: The Lethality of Suicide Terrorism," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 21 (2018): 101-117; Joseph Mroszczyk, "To Die or to Kill? An Analysis of Suicide Attack Lethality," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31, No. 2 (2019): 346-366.

113 For example, Pape, Dying to Win, 2005; Martha Crenshaw, "Explaining Suicide Terrorism: A Review Essay," *Security Studies* 16, No. 1 (2007): 133-162; Assaf Mogahadam, *Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Leonard Weinberg and Ami Pehahzur, "Suicide Terrorism," *Religion Compass* 4, No. 4 (2010): 234-244.

114 Henne, Ancient Fire, 2012; Burstein, Armies of God, 2018.

115 Klein, Ideology Isn't Everything, 2016.

116 Piazza, Islamist Terrorism, 2009; Levy, Lethal Beliefs, 2023.

117 Carter et al., Disaggregating Religiously Motivated Terrorism, 2023.

118 Carter, When Civilians are Targets, 2022.

119 Kurtulus, The New Terrorism, 2011, 486.

120 Carter, When Civilians are Targets, 2022.

121 For example, Appleby, Ambivalence of the Sacred, 2000; Pratt, Religion and Extremism, 2018.

122 For example, Robert J. Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save It: Aum Shinrikyō, Apocalyptic Violence, and the New Global Terrorism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999); James W. Jones, *Blood That Cries Out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Juergensmeyer, Mind of God, 2003; Gregg, Three Theories, 2016; Will McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of The Islamic State* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2015); Frances L. Flannery, *Understanding Apocalyptic Terrorism: Countering the Radical Mindset* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

123 Here again, though, the discussion must be taken up with more nuance, since most of the theorizing in question is about the nature and origins of religious violence in general and not terrorism *per se*, though many of the studies fold discussions of religious terrorism into their analyses (e.g., Juergensmeyer, Mind of God, 2003; Jones, Blood that Cries Out, 2008; C Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008); Armstrong, Fields of Blood, 2014). But sectarian violence, for example, cannot always be equated with terrorism.

124 Moghadam, Al Qaeda, 2008; Mohammed M. Hafez, "The Alchemy of Martyrdom: Jihadi Salafism and Debates over Suicide Bombings in the Muslim World," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 38, No. 3 (2010): 364-378; Kurtulus, The New Terrorism, 2011, 486; Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (London: Hurst, 2016), 71-107; Dawson, Bringing Religiosity – Part II, 2021, 8-10.

125 Pieter Nanninga, "'Cleansing the Earth of the Stench of Shirk': The Islamic State's Violence as Acts of Purification," *Journal of Religion and Violence* 7, No. 2 (2019): 128-157.

126 Juergensmeyer, Mind of God, 2003; Buc, Holy War, 2015; Pratt, Religion and Extremism, 2018.

127 For example, Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," The Atlantic (Sept. 1990), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1990/09/the-roots-of-muslim-rage/304643/. Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); McCants, Isis Apocalypse, 2015.

128 Nevertheless, it is important to note, as others stress (e.g. William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Armstrong, Fields of Blood, 2014), that far more people have died from the mass violence generated by political and nationalist movements. In the

twentieth century alone, tens of millions died during the First and Second World Wars, the Holocaust, the purges of Stalin, the Cultural Revolution in China, and the slaughter unleashed by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. While religion has a palpable record of slaughter throughout history, through wars, crusades, and pogroms, it is far from the most dangerous source of overall violence.

About

Perspectives on Terrorism

Established in 2007, *Perspectives on Terrorism* (PT) is a quarterly, peer-reviewed, and open-access academic journal. PT is a publication of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), in partnership with the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) at Leiden University, and the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV) at the University of St Andrews.

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