

Helpdesk Research Report: Drivers of Extremism

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Query: Identify literature on the drivers of radicalisation and extremism.

Enquirer: Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department, DFID

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1. Overview

There is little consensus on what the key drivers of radicalisation and extremism are. Moreover, many studies on the prevalence of various potential drivers find conflicting outcomes. This helpdesk research report looks at political and socio-economic factors (including service delivery and education), grievances, identity issues and information manipulation. It also looks at the involvement of women in extremist activities.

Some scholars and policy-makers argue that an absence of participatory democracy and a legitimate arena to channel discontent contributes to extremism. However, others have found no causal connection between authoritarianism and extremism. A common finding in the literature is that while consolidated democracies are less prone to extremism and terrorism; countries that are in the process of transitioning to democratic norms are more susceptible to extremism than societies that remain authoritarian.

There is also divergence of opinion over the role of economic conditions. While absolute poverty is not considered by most as a key driver of extremism, it is considered an enabling factor. The more important driver is 'relative deprivation' – disparities among groups and regions regarding economic prosperity, service delivery, educational and employment opportunities and infrastructure. The existence of less developed areas within a country – for example, the North-West Frontier Province in Pakistan and Upper Egypt, can foment instability and extremism.

Grievances, primarily over Western foreign policy and ongoing conflicts, are also commonly recognised as causes of extremism. A particular use of information, and its reduction to a narrow narrative by Western and Islamist extremist leaders have contributed to polarised views. Further, a sense of humiliation – through perceived cultural domination; or specific demeaning acts regularly directed at members of a particular group – are considered a driver of extremism. Issues of identity are also important to women, who desire greater status and respect in patriarchal societies. This has been a motivation for some women to engage in extremist activities.

It is important to note that 'extremism' and 'terrorism' are not interchangeable; the former does not necessarily involve violent or criminal acts, as terrorism does, but focuses on radically

changing society based on an absolutist vision. Much of the recent literature focuses on terrorism, which is reflected in the documents included below. As there is significant overlap between the drivers of extremism and terrorism, these are useful resources.

2. Key Documents

General - Cross-Section of Drivers

- Waslekov, S., 2007, 'An Inclusive World: In Which the West, Islam and the Rest Have a Stake', Strategic Foresight Group, Mumbai:
www.strategicforesight.com/AnInclusiveWorld.pdf

This report discusses the challenges faced today in relations between Islam and the West, how they have emerged, and recommends collaborative initiatives to restructure relations and initiatives to deal with problems of alienation at large. It notes that extremism, while not necessarily involving violent or criminal acts (as does terrorism) may actually be more dangerous than terrorism because it involves mobilising an entire society and reshaping state policies to conform to an absolutist vision. Still, the report notes that there are certain common factors that drive both terrorism and extremism, primarily 'comprehensive political and socio-economic deprivation'. This is different from absolute poverty; often those who live below the poverty line are pre-occupied with daily struggles for existence. Instead, relative deprivation occurs, for example, when certain regions of a country are poorer than other. The author stresses that this is 'comprehensive' deprivation, because it also involves deprivations of political space and human dignity – which are often of greater drivers of terrorism than socio-economic conditions.

Access to Information: In the section 'Lies, Damn Lies and Definitions', the report discusses the damaging discourse that both the Western and Arab worlds have adopted concerning terrorism, which ignores the realities of terrorism in Africa, Asia and Latin American. This mutual obsession with such discourse, the author argues, has resulted in mutual distrust, leading to Islamophobia in the West and anti-American attitudes in the Arab world.

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2007 'Countering Radicalisation Through Development Assistance: A Country Assessment Tool', Copenhagen:
<http://www.um.dk/NR/rdonlyres/2E032131-AC5A-43A6-B238-3F8328DF3859/0/CountryAssessmentTool.pdf>

This report outlines the various factors that contribute to radicalisation, develops a guideline to assess the conditions in countries, and recommends specific forms of intervention. It organises contributing factors into three categories:

- Structural factors: long-term risks that make some societies susceptible to radicalisation. These factors are:
 - Political: governance, political systems, representation, the rule of law, power-sharing and conflict management;
 - Security-related: conflict and violence and the role of the security sector;
 - Socio-economic: welfare and livelihood, including employment opportunities and access to social services and education;
 - Cultural and religious: religious observation, traditional forms of culture, external cultural influences, and public debate on religion and culture.
- Motivational factors: current status, recent developments, possible future trends – i.e. whether the socio-economic situation is deteriorating.
- Triggering factors: incidents that unleash the underlying pressure; these factors are volatile and diverse.

For example in Algeria, support for the Islamic Salvation Front can be analysed based on this model: structural factors included a strong state apparatus, lack of popular political participation, lack of basic human rights, and a weak civil society; motivational factors included an absence of political channels for expressing dissent, lack of social service providers and severe unemployment; the triggering factors was the cancellation of elections in 1992.

Women: This report notes that some women, frustrated with their status in patriarchal societies may be susceptible to radical groups, who promise to increase their sense of dignity and personal worth; and improve their socio-economic conditions.

- Brynjar, L. and Skjølberg, K., 2004, 'Causes of Terrorism: An Expanded and Updated Review of the Literature' FFI/RAPPORT-2004/04307, Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, Kjeller: <http://rapporter.ffi.no/rapporter/2004/04307.pdf>

This report explores common theories and hypotheses concerning the causes of terrorism. It discusses psychological explanations at the individual and group level and societal explanations – including historical development, culture, and contemporary economic and political factors:

- Economic: it argues that poverty is a powerful factor in explaining civil wars and terrorism. It notes that while Krueger and Maleckova (see below) are correct to point out that poverty reduction alone is not the solution to terrorism, their findings that poverty is not a good explanation for terrorism are overstated.
- Political: it stresses that while lack of democratic governance and freedom may give rise to domestic terrorist groups, their longevity is determined more by intra-group dynamics. It notes that consolidated democracies and totalitarian states are less likely to experience domestic terrorism than illiberal and semi-authoritarian states.
- Grievance: it points out that the role of the US in world affairs today, especially regarding Iraq and Afghanistan, is perceived as similar to past colonialism: the British Empire in relation to Egypt and Palestine, and France in relation to Algeria. Terrorist attacks in these cases resulted in Britain and France pulling back.

- Kurrild-Klitgaard, P., Justesen, M. K., and Klemmensen, R., 2006, 'The Political Economy of Freedom, Democracy and Transnational Terrorism', Public Choice, vol. 128, no. 1-2, pp. 289-315. An earlier copy is available at: <http://cipp.gmu.edu/archive/Terrorism%20FreedomRentSeekingPolViolence-Justesen.pdf>

This study tests whether economic freedom (measured by the degree of state interference) and political freedom (measured by the degree of political rights and civil liberties) are directly linked to levels of transnational terrorism:

- Economic freedom: it finds no causal connection between inequality, rapid change (i.e. economic growth) and greater terrorism; nor findings of a larger number of transnational terrorists emerging from poor countries;
- Political freedom: it finds that an increase in democracy from none to a little may increase terrorism and political violence (i.e. during a transition from autocracy to democracy, as in Iraq and Afghanistan); however, high levels of democracy decrease terrorism.

- Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2006, 'Report on International Workshop on Global Extremism, Terror and Response Strategies' Bibliotheca Alexandrina, SMWIM Peace Studies Institute and Strategic Foresight Group, 6-7 August, Alexandria, Egypt: http://www.strategicforesight.com/terrorism_workshop_report.pdf

This workshop explored the sources of extremism in the Middle East, Asia, Europe and Latin America and ways to counter them. Key sources identified were:

- Grievance: the issue of Palestine is an important grievance not just in the Middle East, but also in Southeast Asia, and provides fuel for Muslim militant groups;
- Economic problems: the lack of employment/economic opportunities for the young;
- Political problems: insufficient political inclusion and weak representation;
- Education: the persistence of Madrasas in Pakistan;
- Identity: the framed dichotomy of an austere Islamic state vs. a Western 'trap', based on liberalism, democratisation and human rights. The report stresses the need for an alternative – that builds on Islamic policies of inclusion and tolerance and Islamic cultural achievements.

- Lakshman, K., 2006, Islamism Radicalisation and Developmental Aid in South Asia, DIIS Working Paper, no. 8, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen:

<http://www.diis.dk/graphics/Publications/WP2006/DIIS%20WP%202006-8.web.pdf>

This paper explores the factors commonly identified as contributing to the rise of political and radical Islam, focusing on South Asia – and in particular, Pakistan. These include grievances about Western foreign policy; ongoing conflicts in Kashmir, Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq and prior conflicts, e.g. in Bosnia and Herzegovina – which have contributed to a global Muslim identity; poor economic conditions and socio-cultural isolation; and a democratic deficit. It also cautions about the developing ‘youth bulge’ in the region. It emphasises the role of madrassas and the fact that students tend to come from impoverished families, begin their studies very young and remain isolated from mainstream society during their impressionable teenage years. However, it also notes that poverty and deprivation are not sufficient to explain Islamist radicalisation. The paper offers recommendations on how development aid can be used to delegitimise extremism.

Political Exclusion

- Li, Q., 2005, ‘Does Democracy Promote or Reduce Transnational Terrorist Incidents?’ *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 278-297: available via BLDS; please email blds@ids.ac.uk

This article explores two countering arguments in the literature on democracy and terrorism. The first argues that democracy – by providing access to citizens to seek recourse for their grievances and ensuring non-violent resolution of conflicting interests – reduces terrorism. The second argues that democracy – by providing greater freedom of speech, movement and association, decreases the costs of organizing and conducting terrorist activities – increases terrorism. The author conducts his own study and makes several findings:

- Consistent with the first argument, that greater democratic participation (represented by voter turnout) results in less transnational terrorist attacks in those countries.
- There were fewer terrorist attacks in countries with proportional representation than those with a majoritarian or mixed system.
- In relation to the second argument, the study showed that a limitation on civil liberties does not reduce terrorist attacks, as actors find other ways to engage in violence.
- Finally, contrary to arguments cited earlier, the study found that institutional constraints – i.e. checks and balances – in democratic systems, increase transnational terrorist attacks in those countries, as the deadlock that such systems produce frustrates marginal groups; and weakens the government’s ability to fight terrorism.

- Dalacoura, K., 2006, ‘Islamist Terrorism and the Middle East Democratic Deficit: Political Exclusion, Repression and the Causes of Extremism’, *Democratization*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 508-525: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/3254/>

This article uses case studies to examine whether authoritarianism in the Middle East contributes to the emergence of Islamist terrorism. It explores, first, whether political exclusion and repression of Islamic movements contributes to terrorist methods (al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hizbullah and domestic insurgencies in Egypt and Algeria). Second, it explores the converse – whether allowing for political participation results in moderate Islamism (cases in Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia and Jordan). In both scenarios, the results are mixed; i.e. in some cases, repression still resulted in moderate Islamism. Given that the findings do not demonstrate any conclusive causal link between the democratic deficit and Islamist terrorism, the author recommends that democracy should not be focused upon as the primary solution.

- Piazza, J. A., 2007, ‘Draining the Swamp: Democracy Promotion, State Failure, and Terrorism in 19 Middle Eastern Countries’, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 30, no. 6, pp. 521-539: <http://www.politicalscience.uncc.edu/jpiazza/PiazzaSCT2007.pdf>

This recent study explores whether the promotion of democracy processes and civil freedoms in the Middle East reduces terrorism (both sustained by Middle Eastern countries and perpetrated by groups based in these countries). It first reviews literature that support both sides of the argument, including the work of Eyerman who found that “although democracies overall did exhibit fewer terrorist acts, “new” democracies were more prone to terrorism” (p. 523). It then

discusses the outcomes of an empirical study of 19 Middle Eastern countries, which finds that politically liberal Middle Eastern countries are more prone to terrorism than countries with dictatorships. Further, the study finds that increased episodes of state failure contribute to terrorist activity.

Socio-Economic Exclusion and Service Delivery

- Piazza, J. A., 2006, 'Rooted in Poverty?: Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages,' *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 159-177: available via BLDS; please email blds@ids.ac.uk

This study explores whether poverty, inequality and poor economic conditions (unemployment, poor economic growth, malnutrition) are drivers of terrorism and political violence. It finds, based on an analysis of 96 countries, that there is no significant causal relationship. Instead, it finds that demographic and socio-political conditions (population, ethno-religious diversity, state repression and the structural of party politics) are more important factors behind terrorist activity. The author refers to this as 'social cleavage theory' and advocates its use in explaining terrorism as opposed to economic conditions.

- Sandbrook, R. and Romano, D., 2004, 'Globalisation, Extremism and Violence in Poor Countries', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 6, pp. 1007-1030: <http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/~courses/PoliticalScience/661B1/documents/SandbrookRomanoGlobalisationViolencePoor.pdf>

This article looks at the potential destabilising effects of globalisation, specifically market liberalisation, in poor countries – which can lead to extremist movements. The authors examine the cases of Egypt and Mauritius. They find that Mauritius fared well with market liberalisation because of the country's historic separation of political and economic power; and its strong and effective state institutions, which made sound economic policies and provided for equitable sharing of gains and burdens and a social safety net. Egypt, on the other hand – with inflexible, ineffective state structures and a convergence of political and economic power, was ineffective in managing liberalisation. Structural adjustment policies from the 1970s onward resulted in cuts to services to the poor, which caused riots. Islamist groups stepped in to provide these services. Land reform in 1986 forced farmers off land into the cities, where employment was scarce, resulting in further discontent. Middle and lower-middle class populations were also adversely affected by unemployment and the elimination of employment guarantees. All of these factors, the authors argue contributed to the rise of and support for Islamist movements, some of which adopted extremist outlooks and methods.

- Nedoroscik, J. A., 2002, 'Extremist Groups in Egypt' *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 47-76: available via BLDS; please email blds@ids.ac.uk

This article focuses on the rise of Islamic militant groups in Upper Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood and other fundamentalist groups are considered failures for not addressing the concerns of people in Upper Egypt. While the Muslim Brotherhood and other groups focused more on international issues – i.e. Palestine, pan-Arabism; Upper Egypt militant groups focused on regional problems – mainly dismal socio-economic conditions (Upper Egypt trails the rest of Egypt in health, population control, educational facilities, infrastructure and basic utilities); and critiqued the regime in power, which was seen as corrupt. People making up the Upper Egypt militant movement were drawn from lower-middle, working-class families (as opposed to other fundamentalist movements in Northern Egypt, who were doctors, engineers and other professionals) who were hit hard by President Sadat's 'de-Nasserization programme' – which cut social services, funding to education and government jobs. Sadat was shot in 1981, and the majority of those implicated were from Upper Egypt. The author notes that the central government of Egypt has acknowledged that the development of Upper Egypt will contribute greatly to the elimination of violence by the region's Islamic militants.

Education and Poverty

- Krueger, A. B. and Malečková, J., 2003, 'Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 119-144:
<http://www.krueger.princeton.edu/terrorism2.pdf>

This article explores the links between education, poverty and terrorism by examining evidence from hate crimes, public opinion polls in West Bank and Gaza, and the profiles of participants in Hizbollah militant activities, Palestinian terrorists and those in the Israeli Jewish underground. It finds little direct connection between poverty or poor education and participation in terrorism. Instead, the evidence shows that participants are just as likely to come from economically advantaged families and have relatively high levels of education. The authors explain this finding by identifying terrorism as a violent form of political engagement and noting that it is usually the more educated from privileged backgrounds who are more likely to participate in politics. They have the requisite skills and do not have to concern themselves with daily subsistence.

Crisis in Identity/Masculinity

- Atran, S., 2006, 'The Moral Logic and Growth of Suicide Terrorism', *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 127-147:
http://www.sitemaker.umich.edu/satran/files/twq06spring_atran.pdf

This study argues that it is a mistake to attribute the motivations of suicide terrorists narrowly to expelling foreign forces and to nihilistic opposition to Western civilisation; and to assume that such acts are directed and organized by a specific 'al-Qaeda' group. Rather, it finds that the driving motivation is perceived as cultural domination and humiliation in societies that espouse a "culture of honour." Abuse of elders in front of children, verbal insults, strip-downs, etc. – whether experienced or witnessed in person, viewed on television or through the internet – have a great impact and must be addressed.

Access to Information: The author asserts that edited sound bytes in the mass media have been used with skill by jihadi leaders and ideologues to limit views and foster a polarised and united reaction to perceived injustices, which have nothing to do with Islamic tradition.

Women and Identity

- Badran, M., 2006, 'Women and Radicalisation', *DIIS Report 2006*, no. 5, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen:
<http://www.diis.dk/graphics/Publications/WP2006/DIIS%20WP%202006-5.web.pdf>

The paper examines the radicalisation of women in Muslim societies in Asia and Africa. It looks at specific contexts, identifies women particularly vulnerable to radicalisation, discusses their roles in extremist groups and their enticement to join, and provides recommendations for empowerment. It finds that women most vulnerable are the poor, the under-educated and the socially excluded. In addition, women with strong political grievances, close ties to radicalised men, and those without men, who have lost loved ones in fighting are also at risk. It finds that women join extremist groups because of the prospect of material benefit and greater self-esteem and because of religious pressure.

- Berko, A. and Erez, E., 2007, 'Gender, Palestinian Women and Terrorism: Women's Liberation or Oppression?' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 30, no. 6, pp. 493-519:
http://ict.org.il/var/119/62367-Berko-Erez_May_13-07.pdf

This article explores the motivations of women who take part in terrorist acts, based on interviews with Palestinian women who played various roles in terrorism. It stresses the importance of the context in which Palestinian women face social and political oppression and are not considered equal to men. The women interviewed had different motivations:

- personal – to seek retribution for loss of a loved one;
- opposition to political oppression;
- opposition to patriarchal repression and gender restrictions;
- status - to restore reputation and gain respect.

The authors note that women are generally not full-fledged members of terrorist organisations; rather, their experience is short-lived. Further, the status and respect that they may have been seeking usually does not materialise; instead, such women were more often viewed negatively for having gone against the norms of society.

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Websites visited

Brookings Institution, CEIP, Center for Radicalism and Extremism Studies (UvA), DIIS, Google, Google Scholar, GSDRC, Ingenta journals, Institute for Counter-Terrorism; Institute of Policy Studies, RAND, Strategic Foresight, Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security (Duke University), USIP.

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