

THE POWER OF RELIGION

- Religion is a power tool. Many of people's morals, values, decisions, and perceived existence are traced back to God.
- The idea of doing something because "it is what God wants" can be very attractive to many, especially to those who are devout. This brings us to the idea of religion and terrorism.

THINK ABOUT IT:

What are some things that we do on behalf of religion or just beliefs in general? Pay charity? Help others?

I THOUGHT VIOLENCE WENT AGAINST RELIGION?

- This is a common question that is asked when religious terrorism is discussed and it can be complex to understand. All religions have groups of individuals that interpret the religion in an "extreme" way.
- In each religious text, the way that some things are described can be interpreted openly. This means that some things are up for interpretation, and some interpret them in a way that leads to condoning terrorism.

RELIGIOUS TERRORISM: AN OVERVIEW

There are a few themes that are common amongst all religious terrorist groups.

- Modern ideas vs. Traditional, older values
- A decline in religion and rise in secular, non-religious ideas today.

To understand religious terrorist groups without understanding the religion can sometimes be difficult, however there are many core ideas behind the groups.

- The *divine truth* has more authority than the laws that are manmade. What this means is that the teachings and beliefs of the religion are what should be followed rather than the laws that are made by politicians.
- The rewards in the afterlife are more beneficial than the worldly rewards. This is one of the justifications for terrorists using violence and dying on behalf of this cause.

Religion	Example of a terrorist group within that religion
Buddhism	BoduBalaSena (Buddhist Power Force)
Christianity	The Army of God
Islam	Boko Haram
Judaism	Kahane Chai

WHAT DO YOU THINK? A question that is still not understood today: what are some barriers that governments face when fighting a religious terrorist group?

THE BATTLE AGAINST THE "OTHER"

- With religious groups, more so than other non-religious terrorist groups, they are fighting against an "other".
- Religion creates the ability to establish an "us" and a "them", which combined with the support of God, creates an enemy and a reason to carry out attacks.
- Each religion and group looks at their "other" in a different way. Some see all of those that are the same religion as a part of "them". Others see only those that interpret the text and have the exact same extreme ideology as a part of "them".
- With the idea that God is on their side, all other beliefs and opinions are unjust. The dehumanization of the enemy, calling them "infidels", "apostates", or "godless", just dehumanizes them, further justifying the violence against them.

Infidels, apostates and godless: Terminologies that are used to "dehumanize" the enemy. This is used both within and outside of religious terrorism.

QUESTION: What are the impacts that religion can play on operations of a terrorist group?

ANSWER: Religious terrorist organizations are able to use God to their favor. This can have the biggest impact on the success of recruiting, funding, justifying, and the meaning behind the actions and words that the group partakes in. For example, al-Qaeda's attack on the United States on September 11, 2001 was justified because they were attacking *the infidel*, or nonbeliever of their religion. Having the support of God in carrying out violence can play a vital role in justification.

ISLAM AND TERRORISM

- While almost every major religion has extremists, Islamic terrorism has been one of the more researched and more prominent types in the United States and Europe. With that said, there is **NO** evidence whatsoever to prove that Muslims are more acceptable of terrorism or terrorist activities.
- The miniscule number of Muslims that believe in violence to further goals of an extremism ideology are classified as Salafi-Jihadists
- Some of the most prominent groups that have come out of the Islamic terrorism umbrella as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qaeda.
 - ISIS and al-Qaeda, although very different in many aspects (as are many Islamic terrorist groups), have a similar end goal. These groups, among many other Islamic terrorist groups, seek to establish a caliphate.

Caliphate: An area governed by a Caliph (religious leader and prophet of Muhammad) with Islamic inspired law, called Shari'a law.

- They strive for this alone, among many other goals (which will be touched on in future Table Talks further in depth), has lead to a global movement of Islamic inspired extremism.

TABLE TALK TAKEAWAY:

Almost all religions have a group of extreme individuals that fight for their interpretation of their faith (often called an ideology). Fighting on behalf of God has shown to be very convincing for the members of these groups, allowing for them continue to gain members and sympathy from other members of the religion. To fight or challenge a group that is entrenched in interpretations of a religion can be awfully difficult, creating an issue for governments today, like the United States and much of Europe.