

Final Project: Option #4 Essay

Religious violence and wars that have been fought over persecution for one's beliefs seem to be a prevalent constant when looked at from the larger scope of world history and peoples evolving beliefs in deities and the spiritual world. No matter what people believe in, there has been a consistent conflict throughout history between the church and the state. Broadly speaking when people's beliefs do not align with the laws of the state, whether corrupt or not, people will be persecuted for their beliefs. Ancient Rome dealt with such conflicts and the rise of Christianity can sometimes even be attributed to part of the reason that Rome fell. Whether it was Diocletian trying to instill beliefs in Pagan Roman deities and Christians being persecuted, or Constantine establishing Christianity as the religion of the state and Pagans being persecuted, there has always been violence towards people whose beliefs conflict with those in power. Islam is no exception to this, as its longstanding prevalence in the middle east and growing presence in the west have led to several terror attacks and extremist groups basing what they do on Quranic law. While shown to promote peace and a means for seeking fulfillment for a majority of Islamic followers, the religion has shown to create a significant impact in the international political landscape and influence of the general population through establishing itself as the fastest growing religion and one that has gained much negative attention recently through an unfortunate association with the terrorist group ISIS. A large majority of academic journalism and analysis of history though reveals that it is not the Quranic passages themselves that lead to violence, but rather a large amount of confounding variables

that have been turned into a false correlation between being Muslim and advocating for religious and political violence.

Critics of Islam who associate belief in the religion with being more likely to submit to religious extremism point to several factors and reasons for why they believe so. Common passages in the Quran discussing the treatment of those who are enemies with God, along with texts like the jihad and large terror attacks are what these critics primarily base their reason in (Esposito). Nine eleven and the rise of ISIS, a group that bases their violence in an attempt to cultivate fear and submission into following their religion are the two leading causes though that have had the largest impact of the negative Muslim backlash striking the western world currently (Esposito). No matter the accusations though anybody can accuse and try and link violence to belief in a religion, so the evidence on whether a relation to an Islamic society is prone to lead to more or less violent attitudes must be looked at. On a surface level it is hard to make such a study though as so many other cultural factors could affect the levels of violence in a society. When a closer look is taken though at the types of people attracted to these violent Islamic movements along with the skewing of the western world's understanding of Islam, it is revealed that there has been a false association created between Islam and violence, which is caused instead by confounding variables and whether the nation is based in Islam (Esposito).

A closer analysis of the type of people that Islamic extremist recruit, the western world's information bias against Islam, and the socio-economic factors associated with religious violence make clear the false association that has been built up between Islamic belief and tendencies towards violence. Something that many people do not know to start with is that a

large part of ISIS's recruiting hotbed is prisons (Hamm). Why try convincing peaceful people to be violent because they share your beliefs, when you could get people who already tends towards violence and are much more vulnerable to turn to religion given their circumstances. Further investigation by the British Journal of Criminology lead to a discovery that roughly 240,000 prison inmates have converted to Islam in the United States since September 11th, and Saudi-backed Wahhabi clerics make these their primary targets for recruitment (Hamm).

Western bias in the coverage of terror not only in the news, but also in academia though have been a deceptive means connect the religion to terrorism (Wiseman). Ever since September 11th textbooks in Arabic and predominantly Muslim nations have been carefully critiqued and corrected for anything that might offend people in that it promotes violence and hate (Wiseman). Countries who population is made up primarily of people of Muslim faith have been found in studies to heavily include studies of Islamic culture. The western world's textbooks also changed, but have went in a completely opposite direction. Instead research has pointed to a strong correlation between Islamic discussions in western textbooks and terror (Wiseman). When most of the discussion in these textbooks about the religion is being related to violence and this is what is being taught as fact, it is no wonder so many people are brought up to have such a skewed and false view of the religion. The common counterargument to this though is to look to the Middle East. There is obviously a much larger amount of political unrest there, but the misconception is when all of this turmoil is related to the Middle East being comprised primarily of Islamic nations. The intrastate violence therefore must be investigated throughout these nations. A comparative political studies journal looked into this connection between the Islamic presence in the Middle East and the amount of unrest and

violence there. The key to doing this though was to not focus on all the terror and interstate war outside of the states, but instead isolate the nations to look for factors within the nations other than Islam that could be causing the civil unrest (Fish, Jensenius and Michel). By doing a cross-national analysis, they found there was no correlation between the proportion of the population that believes in Islam and mass scale political violence. Another journal based in empirical and theoretical investigations into issues looked into the problem of violence in the Middle East, but not just within the nations included but comparing the nations of the Middle East to others. They did find that there was a larger prevalence of violence in these nations, but a nation being Islamic did not mean that it would be a violent one. Instead they applied political and economic thought on GDP, resources such as oil, and autocratic governments to show that the strong correlation between these variables and political violence should be attributed to the unrest in the Middle East, and not the religion of Islam and Quranic law in general (Karakayaa).

Not only do most studies point to outside factors as being the main contributors to political violence, but one study on the support of suicide bombing from American Muslims showed a reverse correlation between belief and violence, in that the majority of reasonable people who have a rational understanding of the Quran actually tend to be less supportive of violent political measures than do the average population (Acevedo and Chaudhary). The Pew survey used logistic regression models to show that religious factors and political views have a virtually nonexistent effect of the feelings of American Muslims towards suicide bombing (Acevedo and Chaudhary). Quranic authoritativeness was tested on the other hand, or how much people believe the Quran is from God and not from men, against views on suicide

bombing and this is where they found the reverse correlation on people who believe in Quranic law and their support of political violence (Acevedo and Chaudhary).

A historical understanding of religious violence is key to realizing that the problem of Islamic terror is not caused by the religious texts, but rather the religious fanaticism and military extremism associated with the Islamic caliphate. A comparison of the modern day Islamic movement headed by Ra'id's movement to the Order of the Templars reveals striking similarities between to acts of violence they committed, even though they were based in different religious texts (Revkin). The Christian beliefs of the Order of the Templars does not mean that they are less prone to commit violence, but it is more of the ability of leaders to exploit people's beliefs in a way that leads to complete devotion to the point where you are willing to murder for your cause. Exploiting fanaticism and backing it up with the force of the military is something that can be done with any religion though in any nation, the political landscape and rhetoric simply must be successful in uniting people under a belief in eliminating those who don't agree with you.

While the Islamic religion has been in the national spotlight lately and has received much negative attention for the violence that is being justified by Quranic and Jihadists texts, a true analysis of the source of this violence reveals that it is not seeded in Islamic beliefs but rather opportunism and capitalizing on people who are prone succumb to religious zealotry. The sheer amount of coverage of the terror in the western world has led people to develop a false association between that and terror, and their justifications of this by referencing the Middle East are easily disproven by showing the stronger correlation between the GDP and resources of nations over there. Although Islamic persecution is more prevalent than it has

been, a search for a true understanding on the causes of such violence are necessary for not falsely accusing those who innocently believe. Whether or not a majority of society is able to grasp this in the coming decades will determine whether Islamic prosperity continues or starts to fade away into the depths of history.

Works Cited

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