

# Religious fundamentalism and terrorism

[Society](#), [Terrorism](#)



Religious fundamentalism and terrorism are products of globalization. Discuss.

" Following evidence of a revitalization in religious faith throughout the world, and a series of terrorist incidents purportedly motivated by religious fundamentalism, various commentators have argued globalization has ushered in new forms of radical religious belief and expression and a unique form of contemporary terrorism.

This essay contends that while various forms of religious belief and terrorism have been present in all human societies where congregation of groups has occurred, religious individualism and the current examples of terrorism are distinctly modern phenomena intimately bound to the processes and consequences of globalization. This essay will examine firstly how globalization has acted as a catalyst for the growth in religious fundamentalism and a resultant rise in religiously justified violence, and secondly how the unequal experiences of globalization has led to a rise in terrorist activity.

Specifically, the notion of a perceived necessity for a reassertion of religiosity as a response to globalization will be examined, particularly as a result of; the nonviolence and clash of beliefs and ideas; forces of secularism; the consequences of modernity and the anxieties associated with social disruption; and the issue of increased power convergence and a resultant increase in general powerlessness will be investigated.

Expressions of religion, and political violence have been ever-present in society, and are generally reflective of that particular period of human relations; religious fundamentalism and contemporary terrorism thus, are

the extreme expressions of the globalized world. The notion of globalization is somewhat undefined, it is not altogether new, but is coming increasingly synonymous with the twentieth century. Simply put, globalization is an ongoing trend whereby the world has - in many respects and at a generally accelerating rate - become one relatively borderless social sphere.

Specifically the last twenty to thirty years have seen an exponential increase in the speed of globalization and its effects. McGraw defines globalization as " a historical process involving a fundamental shift or transformation in the spatial scale of human social organization that links distant communities and expands the reach of power relations across regions and continents. " 4 Globalization is then, the trend towards an increasingly interconnected society, with a convergence of cultures, spread of information and ideas.

From the technological boom that created commercial air travel, telecommunications and the internet, societies and cultures are more linked and influenced by one another. Jan Interveen Pitters argues that increasing cross-cultural communication, mobility, migration, trade, investment, and tourism all generate awareness of cultural difference, leading to ambiguity and complexity in the orientation of self-identity. 5 It is this uncertainty that has led commentators to assert that religious fundamentalism and contemporary terrorism are products of globalization.

Religious fundamentalism can be broadly defined as a particular form of religious expression. Fundamentalists claim to be the upholders of orthodoxy that is the 'right' creeds, values and beliefs; they also claim to uphold orthographies that is the 'right' codes of conduct and behaviors. 6 In terms of

the religious community, fundamentalism is distinct from conservatism and traditional belief, and lies to the extreme of religious expression. According to Earthen, " it is a religious way of being, that manifest itself in a strategy by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group in the face of modernity and colonization. " 8 Here Earthen contends that in the ever-changing globalizes world, in the face of ambivalence and ambiguity, individuals and groups turn to religion in order to provide a sense of certainty and social identity.

For religious fundamentalists, religion itself provides a ready-made package of solutions, they assert their own understanding of these as the key to clarifying humanity mission in life; as the way to explain why things are going wrong in the world; and as a way to empower those who feel powerless and buffeted by the world. It is contended that it is the results of globalization that have pushed many to religious fundamentalism.

Terrorism has been present as long as people have congregated in societies, although the term terrorism is considered to most likely have originated around the French Revolution of the 18th century in reference to the reign of terror. Al A universal conceptual definition of terrorism, Lutz and Lutz argue, has never been established and agreed upon, they point to the lack of a common classification in the international sphere as evidence of this. 2 However for the purposes of progress, Bergsten contends that terrorism can be defined as, " the premeditated use of violence by a non-state group to obtain a political, religious, or social objective through fear or intimidation directed at a large audience. " 13 Simply, terrorism involves three main

factors; first the use or threat of use of violence, secondly it is mimed at achieving a political objective, and third it requires an audience larger than the immediate victims of the violence itself.

Significantly, terrorism is a microcosm of the broader society from which it is drawn; 14 thus it will constantly mutate and be always unique to a particular time period, however, the present debate surrounds the contention that in the contemporary era, it is globalization that has motivated and shaped the form terrorism has taken.

Globalization and the convergence and clash of ideas, information and beliefs intrinsic to it has presented a challenge of plural and parallel claims too single god r belief system, it is argued that this process of globalization has pushed many to fundamentalist forms of religious expression, to reassert the 'correctness'<sup>15</sup> of their religion. As Featheriness notes, " the process of globalization leads to the compression of culture. Things formerly held apart are now brought into contact and juxtaposition. 16th experience Featheriness highlights is now common on a global level because of globalization, with the exposure of new ideas, of religion and god being compared to previously held beliefs. Believers of monotheistic religions, such s Islam, Judaism and Christianity all face new and plural claims to their religion, also claiming to possess knowledge of and access to the 'one true' god, and 'one true' way to communicate with themed.

Karen Armstrong argues that a turn to religious fundamentalism and for some, religiously motivated violence is an attempt to reaffirm their god, religion and particular belief system, and is an attempt to push the universal

application of their beliefs. 18 Here similar to the response to a confused world, globalization creates challenges to current religious beliefs, this halogen questions the beliefs of many, pushing many to respond.

Some Armstrong argues, are motivated to violent expressions of their desire for religious universality, claiming that much contemporary religiously motivated terrorism is a reaction to the awareness of the plurality of religions, a result of the processes of globalization. Furthermore, religions face additional challenges, from a plurality of claims to being the 'one true' god, religion's risk a relativistic of all claims. Featheriness points out that, " the spiral of relativism of culture through increased contact, juxtaposition and lashing, creates many questions about long-held formations of culture. Rehire Featheriness notes that awareness of numerous claims of monotheistic religions to be the sole universal religion risks devaluing all these claims, god may no longer be universal but more culturally or racially specific. Malaise Earthen describes the uncertainty this creates as a " crisis of faith" and further illustrates it as " anxieties generated by the thought that there are ways of living and believing other than those deemed by one's group's version of the deity. 20 Similarly to plural claims of monotheistic religions, the challenge posed by a relativistic of religion argues Armstrong, 21 pushes many to believe that the reassertion of religious universality is necessary, prompting many to simply restate and attest to their religions universality and superiority by turning to extreme forms of religious fundamentalism, but also is responsible for current trends of religiously motivated terrorism as a response to the largely modern phenomenon that is globalization.

The advent of globalization has further tested religion by preaching the spread of secularism and the normalization of religion intrinsic to it. As a response, many believers have been further hardened towards fundamentalist approaches to religion, whilst others have been inspired to violence in order to reassert the importance of religion in the modern secularism world. Malaise Earthen argues that the secularist ideal that religious beliefs should be substituted for scientific evidence and rationality has left no room for religion in mainstream society. <sup>2</sup> The current trend being that religious notions are thought to be somewhat subjective and that more objective and reliable forms of governing society should be used, pushing religion out of the public sphere, and into only the private sector.

Gerry Manders suggests that "fundamentalists oppose secularism; they believe it is the reason for the social and moral decline of society." <sup>23</sup> Here contending that fundamentalists view secular governance as the enemy of religion, they reject the notion that reason and rationality can provide them meaningful solutions to their social and personal problems.

Walter Liqueur discusses this rejection with reference to the Muslim Brotherhood operating in Egypt. <sup>24</sup> Egypt had seen the failure of secular leaders, who industrialists believed were responsible for decisions that uprooted tradition and gambled their culture. The brotherhood believed that they must restore their communities moral compass and pride, here they resisted and rejected claims of the supposed secular government superiority. <sup>25</sup> Similar attacks by Christian groups against abortion clinics and places it sees as homosexual havens, are designed to purify the ills of society and restore its moral fiber.

Here secularist forces of globalization have provoked extreme religious responses, as well as many violent expressions of dissatisfaction. Current religiously justified violence is not solely directed outwards by perpetrators, many see the concessions that many mainstream believers have made as a requirement to participate in the modern globalized world as requiring adjustment. The demands that the contemporary globalized world places upon the individual in their daily lives are immense and the sacrifice of numerous religious practices is often inevitable.

Gerry Manders outlines the problems associated with living a religious life in the modern globalized world, pointing especially to the stricter interpretations of the major religions as being particularly prone to forced disobedience. 27 Gerry Manders exemplifies his point by pointing to the daily prayer rituals of the major religions and the inability of these to fit within many westernized occupations, as well as this the requirement to turn-the-other-cheek approach to some of the more liberal elements of society, at odds with many of the major religions. 8 The notion of sacrifice in the globalized world is not an unknown quantity, all individuals at one time or another have been forced to sacrifice meeting, be it family, friends, business, politics or leisure, religion is no different and it is this point Gerry Manders makes. However, the sacrifices of many mainstream, Jews, Christians and Muslims are viewed as a betrayal and dangerous by more fundamental groups of believers. Rainstorm points to the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, 29 following actions some fundamentalists viewed as a betrayal to the Jewish homeland.



Yell Learner, an outspoken extremist Israeli supported the assassin's actions, arguing that political assassination of Jewish leaders should be supported who were felt to be dangerously irresponsible and were De facto enemies of Judaism. 30 Further, Rainstorm suggests that anger concessions of mainstream religious groups is not limited to Judaism, citing examples of bombings of abortion clinics in America and other Western nations by Christian fundamentalists. 31 A further example is the AAA Qaeda group that has as one if its stated aims the re-establishment of an Islamic state based on the strict Habits teachings. 2 Here the unique demands that the modern globalizes world places upon religious individuals as well as the religion as a whole are immense, provoking some fundamental elements to terrorism to rectify what they see as dangerous. The process of globalization and the increased speed of change it has bought to the daily lives of individuals, communities and nation-states, has led to a form of 'cultural crisis,'33 that has created constant alteration and consequently instability and unpredictability to the lives of many has pushed a revival of faith to provide stability and predictability to the lives of those affected.

Anticipating Banyan's notion of 'liquid modernity Rainstorm argues that, " the accelerated dissolution of traditional inks of social and cultural cohesion within and between societies with the current globalization process, combined with the historical legacy, and current conditions of political repression, have all led to an increased sense of fragility, instability and unpredictability for the present and the future. 35 Noting that in the current climate means of defining identity are no longer as conspicuous as they once were, creating a situation where one is dislocated and disengaged from

society, unsure as to what beliefs and values are indeed the ones to be believed. Rainstorm further contends that " they take refuge in religion, which provides centuries old-ideals by which to determine goals; they find physical or psychological sanctuary against repression. 36 Stating that people turn or return to religion, as religion itself provides a ready-made package of solutions, including authority structures and institutions to regulate behavior as well as rules and answers to moral questions, providing something solid and consistent where it previously didn't. Lacquerer summarizes, stating that " if these are the norms of today, the prospects for tomorrow are bleak, and once again the certainties of their religion, their god and their text are appealing. 37 Banyan argues that it is the perceived need of these dislocated people to assert these religious codes and creed onto society for their lives, which pushes some to a point where violence appears appropriate or even preferable as a means of achieving it. 38 It is thus the worldwide experience of dislocation and unpredictability inherent to globalization largely unique to contemporary times that has thrust many to religion as a solution; some perceive a need to use terrorist violence to achieve their aims.

Similarly globalization has instituted a situation where many are powerless to affect their own destiny, turning to terrorism as a 'politics of last resort'. 39 Marty and Appleby argue that through foreign ownership, government amalgamations and the liberalization of social, economic and public sectors, globalization has removed much of the ability of individuals to affect their immediate surroundings. 40 Noting here that the power to control society is

increasingly converging into the hands of a few elites and away from the masses, as a result of globalization.

Further, Lingers argues that these feelings of hopelessness and desperation are considerably more likely to occur and to a more extreme extent in the more marginal groups within society, specifically minorities and the disadvantaged. 41 Significantly then, those within society who have been traditionally denied political, social and economic rights and control over their lives, are further disenfranchised by the processes of globalization.

Armstrong contends that this powerlessness, fuels feelings of firstly hopelessness, and eventually an overwhelming frustration to alter ones lot in life. 42 This 'solicitation process'<sup>43</sup> of increasing frustration ultimately pushes individuals to cross a Violence threshold'. 44 At this point argues Glare rational choice is made that traditional peaceful means of protest and dissent are no longer effective, and violence becomes a 'politics of last resort'. 5 The inability to control one's destiny as a result of globalization, it is argued has pushed those most drastically affected towards terrorism as a means of remonstrance. The experience of globalization is incredibly complex and ambivalent, being unique to every nation, community and individual. Globalization through the removal of space and time, the distribution of knowledge and expertise and a growth in technological development, promises countless benefits, however it is these same developments that have catalysed a growth in religious fundamentalism and politically motivated violence.

Significantly the compression of space and time has juxtaposed supposed universal religions against one another, provoking conflict; the notion of secularism and scientific discovery as unsurpassed has motivated a reassertion of religiosity, specifically a more extreme form; further the modern world and the sacrifices from mainstream forces required to operate within it, have aggravated an extreme and sometimes violent response, and finally, the growth of a powerful global elite, controlling the globe from a distant has resulted in feelings of powerlessness and generated frustration in the more marginal's pockets of the world.

Globalization has delivered much progress for society, however the fact that the benefits of this progress are generally unevenly distributed and have disrupted many traditional cultures and beliefs, it has often provoked unforeseen consequences.