

A-S 3900
Global Perspectives on
Terrorism
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A Good Film on Anti-Colonial Terrorism

- *Michael Collins* (1996)
- Michael Collins was an activist and leader in Ireland's struggle for independence between 1916 and 1920.
- He was also a leading figure in the Irish Republican Army (IRA).



Psychological Explanations

- Common CW: Terrorists suffer from mental illness.
 - Thesis: radicalization is caused by mental illness.
 - No evidence support this thesis.



Psychological Explanations

- Borum: vulnerability and propensities
 - What kind of people are vulnerable to terrorist messages?
 - What kind of mindsets lead to propensities for violence and radicalization?



The "Authoritarian" Mindset

- Characteristics:
 - submission to authority
 - anger and aggression toward "out-groups"*
- Thinking style:
 - rigidity
 - dualism (dichotomies; black and white)
 - intolerance of ambiguity

* Think of Sen: positive and negative manifestations of nationalism

The "Authoritarian" Mindset

- "Authoritarians seek protection from danger as well as direction when faced with uncertainty."

The "Dogmatic" Mindset

- Characteristics:
 - closed cognitive system of beliefs and disbeliefs about reality
 - patterns of intolerance
 - unable to process contrary information
 - hostility to different views
 - dualism in thinking
 - dehumanizing of opponents
- i.e., "authoritarianism +"

The "Apocalyptic" Mindset

- Characteristics:
 - belief in "approaching confrontation, cataclysmic event, or transformation of epochal proportion"
 - sense of urgency: the cataclysm is imminent
 - violence is justified to achieve justice and hasten the end
- Can be exacerbated by psychological states such as depression or psychosis (uncertainty of reality)

Psychological Vulnerabilities

- A need for personal meaning and identity
 - purpose, value, self-worth
- A need for belonging
 - sometimes this is the initial appeal for prospective terrorists
- Perceived injustice and/or humiliation
 - view injustice as intentional
 - strong desire to punish perpetrators

Attitudinal Propensities

- Pro-violence attitudes
- Tendency to harbor grievances
- External threat perception
- Sensation-seeking
- "Disinhibition": moral disengagement from conventional sanctions on violent behavior

Sum

- What makes an individual open to terrorist messages?
- Borum: look for a combination of:
 - Specific mindsets
 - Psychological vulnerabilities
 - Attitudinal propensities



A Word on Cults

- No universally accepted definition.
- Generally, the emphasis is on novel and deviant belief systems.
 - Religious, spiritual, philosophical.
 - Usually centered around a charismatic individual.

