PERSPECTIVES ON SECURITY, TERRORISM AND COUNTER-TERRORISM

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ABSTRACT

Canadian studies show that those with concerns about terrorism appear to be from older cohorts, have negative perceptions of Muslims, be concerned about ethnic strife and immigration and be more likely to favour measures to combat terrorism that impact on civil liberties. Given that the studies show there is a high level of antipathy towards Muslims, further research is needed to identify the source of this antipathy.

RÉSUMÉ

Des études canadiennes démontrent que les individus ayant le plus d'inquiétudes envers le terrorisme semblent être plus avancés en âge, faire preuve d'une attitude négative envers les Musulmans, ressentir de l'inquiétude face à l'immigration et aux différends qui peuvent émerger entre les individus provenant de différentes cultures et être favorables à l'instauration de mesures visant à combattre le terrorisme qui limitent les libertés civiles. Puisque les études démontrent qu'il existe un fort degré d'antipathie envers les Musulmans, une recherche approfondie doit être réalisée afin d'identifier les sources de cette antipathie.

BACKGROUND

Since 9/11, tackling terrorism has become an important issue for Western Governments. Over the last decade, there has also been an emergence of homegrown terrorism with young Muslims often born and brought up in the West allying themselves with radical Islamist movements and advocating violence to achieve their goals. This has resulted in terrorist attacks, such as the London Bombings, and with young Muslim men travelling abroad to become foreign jihadi fighters in conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. The Toronto 18 bomb plot in 2006 and the possible involvement of two Canadian citizens in the recent attack on an Algerian gas facility by Al-Qaeda militants give an indication of the problem of homegrown terrorism within Canada itself.

There have been numerous strategies employed by Western Governments to combat terrorism that provide law enforcement agencies with greater powers such as longer periods of detention without charge, more invasive surveillance measures, and wider stop-search powers. The Canadian Anti Terrorism Act introduced after 9/11 was controversial due to its widely perceived incompatibility with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in particular because of the Act's provisions allowing for secret trials, pre-emptive detention, and expansive security and surveillance powers. Concerns have been voiced in the UK that similar measures have alienated Muslims, thus fuelling the potential of recruitment for terrorist activities(Kundani, 2009). There has also been increasing concern that the multicultural policies adopted by Western Governments have in fact hampered integration and resulted in Muslim communities leading parallel lives which provide fertile territory for extremism to develop. (Cameron,2011).

KANISHKA PROJECT

There is a lack of empirical research conducted in Western democracies on the issue of terrorism (see Silke, 2009, for an excellent analysis); consequently, many counter-terrorism strategies are based on secondary

research. In order to redress this knowledge gap, the Canadian Government launched the Kanishka Project, an initiative aimed at investing in research on pressing questions for Canada on terrorism and counter-terrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism. One of the commissioned projects, led by Dr Jack Jedwab of the Association of Canadian Studies, has looked at what Canadians perceive to be at the heart of the problem of terrorism, and how terrorism has affected their country and their views on acceptable and effective means to combat terrorism. The project has conducted two surveys thusfar, involving a total of 3,700 Canadians.

WHAT IS TERRORISM?

Findings: Canadians responding to the surveys saw terrorism as something that involved force or violence and which was driven by political or religious motivation. Around a third of Canadians were unable or unwilling to define terrorism, a situation which reflects a possible uneasiness about discussing the topic. In terms of the causes of terrorism, Canadians felt religious fundamentalism was the primary cause of terrorism, rather than poverty and foreign policy. The vast majority of Canadians felt that terrorism had not declined over the last decade and this view became more pronounced in relation to age. Canadians who were most concerned with terrorism appeared to be from an older age cohort and had more negative and less trusting views about Muslims. Those most concerned about terrorism were also more concerned about conflicts occurring outside Canada, were more likely to view ethnic conflicts in Canada as being a problem and felt that Muslims were at fault for their own discrimination. People who were concerned about a domestic terrorist attack in Canada also felt that immigration and ethnic diversity were a threat to national identity.

Comment: Other studies have found that concerns about terrorism have changed in relation to the immediacy of an attack. Huddy *et al.* (2002a) found that after 9/11, there was a sharp increase in the level of concern with regards to terrorism, but by early 2002 (Huddy *et al.* 2002,b), concerns with regards to being a victim of terrorism fell back to levels expressed prior to 9/11. In Australia, following the Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005, which were the most significant terrorist attack involving Australian citizens, concern peaked after both attacks but subsided thereafter (Cummins, 2005). Younger people have been found to be less concerned about terrorism, while less educated and migrant groups have been found to be more concerned about terrorism. Interestingly, some academics have pointed out that perceived concerns of terrorism may be highly exaggerated if we consider that an American citizen has a one in 80,000 chance of being a victim of terrorism, which is the equivalent of being hit by a meteor (Mueller,2006).

RELATIONS WITH MUSLIMS

Findings: Muslims were the least trusted community in Canada, significantly less so (trusted) than immigrants as a whole, with older cohorts expressing this distrust to a greater extent. Those who held negative views about relations with Muslims were also more likely to support stronger security measures and less likely to support educational measures such as interfaith dialogues or learning about other religions.

Comment: In the UK, similar negative attitudes towards Muslims have been found, with around three quarters of British people believing that Muslims had a negative impact on the country (Tzorztkis, 2010), while more than half of Britons linked Islam with extremism (You Guv, Exploring Islam, 2010). Merolla and Zechmeister (2009) found Americans had become less trusting of Muslims and were in favour of policies that may Stigmatize Muslims in order to combat terrorism. In the US, further work has been done on the origins of this Muslim antipathy. Park *et al.* (2007) felt that social communication may play a role in the formation of these roles. When individuals were exposed to negative information about terrorist activities involving Arabs, their prejudice against them increased, but when showed positive information, their prejudice was moderate. Kalkan *et al.* (2009) conducted more in depth work about the origins of this antipathy and felt this anti- Muslim sentiment may have originated prior to September 2001 when Muslims were viewed as an outgroup in a similar way to illegal immigrants, welfare recipients, and gay and lesbian communities.

STRATEGIES TO COMBAT TERRORISM

Findings: Canadians as a whole were not in agreement with measures such as ID cards, detention without trial, and the restriction of civil liberties. Those who favoured giving up civil liberties were more likely to be from older cohorts and hold more negative opinions with regards to Muslims. Those most concerned about terrorism were also far more likely to support the idea that everyone should carry identity cards that could be shown to authorities upon request, and also to support the idea of giving up civil liberties. Younger Canadians were most likely to have a positive outlook towards multicultural policies and those who were advocates of multicultural policies were less favourable of legislative measures such as identity cards and the lack of protection under human rights law for

those under suspicion of terrorism. Those who favoured abandoning civil liberties were likely to have fears about immigration. In terms of educational measures (such as learning about other religions), those who were in favour were less negatively concerned about immigration and more positive about relations with Muslims. Canadians who felt terrorism had declined in the last ten years were more likely to cite foreign interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq as an effective strategy than those who did not feel that the terrorism threat had subsided.

Comment: In the US, Merolla and Zechmeister Merolla and Zechmeister (2009) also found that people who were more concerned about being victims of a terrorist attack were more willing to trade civil liberties and more supportive of the US being active abroad. Davis and Silver (2004) found that Americans with a greater sense of threat were less likely to support civil liberties. Researchers found that these sentiments could be linked to the degree of trust one feels towards their government. The less people trust their government, the less willing they are to trade off civil liberties for security, regardless of their level of threat, which also yielded differences in terms of ethnicity. African Americans are much less willing to trade civil liberties for security than whites or Latinos, even with other factors taken into account. In the UK, a Home Office (Dstl2010) review of opinion polls and surveys seeking to be representative of the general UK population tends to show majority agreement, or support for, certain counter-terrorism measures even though they may erode civil liberties. However, the evidence shows there is less support within samples of UK Muslim populations who have stronger negative perceptions of counterrorism legislation and perceive it as violations of civil liberties and human rights.

INFLUENCE OF MEDIA

Findings: The media was also found to have played a part in framing individual perceptions. The extent to which people follow news about the world had some impact on whether they worry about terrorist attacks in Canada and whether they feel that an irreconcilable conflict between Western societies and Muslim societies exists. Those most likely to follow news about world events were also most likely to identify religious fundamentalism as the principal factor behind terrorist activities, while those who never follow world events were most likely to withhold their opinion on the subject and were more likely to answer with "I don't know."

Comment: There is evidence that regular viewers of TV news were likely to perceive the terrorist threat as high (Nisbet and Shanahan, 2005). Nacos *et al.* (2007) found that in the US, perceptions of terrorism were not simply dependent on the volume of news dedicated to reporting on terrorism but were also linked to the particular source of information that delivers this news and moves public opinion. It was found that the President and his administration had the biggest influence on the public's perception of the terrorist threat. When Lewis (2004) analysed the role of the media during the Iraq War, they found that media coverage throughout the war shifted public opinion to an avowedly pro-war stance. It was believed that media coverage from journalists embedded within American and British troops was a significant factor in this shift.

CONCLUSIONS

Dr Jedwab's study demonstrates that those with concerns about terrorism appear to be from older cohorts, have negative attitudes towards Muslims and be more concerned about ethnic strife and immigration. They also are most likely to favour measures that may impact civil liberties over measures that are educational in nature. Given the studies show there is a high level of antipathy towards Muslims in Canada, further research is perhaps needed to identify the source of this antipathy and whether this is solely related to concerns about terrorism or whether there are other underlying causes. Other studies have shown that Muslims (Dstl, 2010) and other minority groups (David and Silver, 2004) display the greatest opposition to counter terrorism legislation, thus further research is required in terms of perceptions according to race, religion and ethnicity. This is especially pertinent with regards to the fact that in the surveys individuals with the greatest concerns about terrorism appeared to also have concerns about immigration and ethnic strife, which has potential implications for social cohesion. There is also clear evidence that the media can be influential in building perceptions. In this current digital age, there are a myriad of forms of media and social communication and it is important to see how these can affect an individual's perception of terrorism. Given how the surveys demonstrate that civil liberties and multiculturalism are interwoven into the public discourse surrounding terrorism, it is imperative to find out how opinions on these issues are framed.

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