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The Terrorism Enigma

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Abstract

Everyday life in the United States reflects the terrorist narrative in many ways. This narrative refers to the notion that “everything changed after 9/11,” including how we discuss and treat sports, corporations, allies, enemies, politicians, and especially the ways in which the military that has been folded into numerous institutional practices in American life. Major changes in culture and how these were propagandized are reflected in daily interaction and public places will be summarized with an emphasis on how international terrorism and especially domestic terrorism led to expanded surveillance and social control. Domestic terrorism affected everyday life experiences and expectations with the increase of mass shootings in religious settings and schools.

Keywords: terrorism, propaganda, mass shootings, cultural change

Introduction

Going to worship, going to school, enjoying a movie or sporting event are different since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Peter Berger and other sociologists argue that the most important thing you can know about someone is what they take for granted². Increasingly, it is how events are experienced and presented in popular culture that guides what is taken for granted³. Popular culture depictions of everyday life experience after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States

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² Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann. *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. No. 10. Penguin UK, 1991.- Douglas, Jack D. "Understanding everyday life: Toward the reconstruction of sociological knowledge." (1971).- Kotarba, Joseph A., and Andrea Fontana, eds. *The existential self in society*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987.

³ Waskul, Dennis D., and Phillip Vannini, eds. *Popular Culture as Everyday Life*. Abingdon, Routledge, 2015.

amplify fear and celebrate American military presence and the routinization of surveillance and social control. Americans greatly fear terrorism. A recent study of fear and terrorism states:

Placed in context, fear of a terrorist attack was the second greatest fear expressed by respondents, outranked only by widespread civil unrest. Americans appear to fear terrorism more than many other potentially harmful events, including economic or financial collapse (43.3 percent), natural disasters (40 percent), nuclear weapons attack (39.6 percent), pandemic or major epidemic (37.5 percent), illegal immigration (37.2 percent), and Whites no longer being the majority (21.5 percent)⁴.

This fear and many mediated accounts of attacks and mass shootings have had profound effects on everyday life experiences. It is not only that the military budget has mushroomed following 9/11 terror attacks, but the cultural immersion into military-speak, insertion into popular culture, and the ubiquitous military fashions impregnated what we wear. Domestic terrorism on ethnic groups, religious gatherings, anti-Semitism, and various mass shootings--especially at schools--have expanded fear. The following pages highlight several changes in routine practices, such as travel, surveillance and security, personal space, as well as discourse and popular culture. The role of news, public information, popular culture and propaganda precedes a brief discussion of changes in private and public behavior in our age of mediated terror.

Analysis of news reports and advertisements suggests that popular culture and mass media depictions of fear, patriotism, consumption, and victimization contributed to the emergence of a “national identity” and collective action that was fostered by elite decision-makers’ propaganda⁵. The tragic loss of lives and property resulting from the 9/11 attacks fueled patriotic slogans, thousands of commercial advertisements, public contributions of more than \$2 billion, major domestic and foreign policy changes, and the largest increase in the military budget in 35 years. Stores sold out of flags, businesses linked advertising to patriotic slogans (e.g., General Motors’ “Keep America Rolling”), and baseball fans sang “God Bless America” before “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” during the 7th inning stretch.

⁴ Haner, Murat, et al. "Public Concern about Terrorism: Fear, Worry, and Support for Anti-Muslim Policies." *Socius* 5 (2019): pp. 1-17

⁵ Altheide, David L. "Consuming terrorism." *Symbolic Interaction* 27.3 (2004): 289-308.

Social institutions hyper-adjusted to government propaganda, surveillance and control after the Trade Towers fell in 2001. Advertising and the market economy joined with giving and “self-less” assistance to others. For example, the Ad Council (Advertising Research Foundation) adopted a strong coalition stand against terrorism, noting in an online communication that “it was originally founded as the War Advertising Council during World War II in the aftermath of the bombings of Pearl Harbor” Following an “all advertising industry meeting,” a strategy was adopted on September 18, 2001 to “inform, involve and inspire Americans to participate in activities that will help win the war on terrorism” (Foundation, 2001).

The drug war and ongoing concerns with crime contributed to the expansion of fear with terrorism. Messages demonizing Osama bin Laden, his Taliban supporters, and “Islamic extremists” linked these suspects with the destructive clout of illegal drugs and especially drug lords. News reports and advertisements joined drug use with terrorism and helped shift “drugs” from criminal activity to unpatriotic action. A \$10 million ad campaign promoted the message from President Bush in 2002, “If you quit drugs, you join the fight against terror in America.”

The run-up to the post-9/11 experiences of fear began several decades prior to the attacks. The public information about the need for extraordinary measures to combat fear has been fueled by government and police officials, who serve as dominant news sources, and therefore are significant actors in defining problems and setting political agendas. The extensive use of fear to highlight crime news has produced a discourse of fear, which may be defined as the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness, and expectation that danger and risk are a central feature of the effective environment, or the physical and symbolic environment as people define and experience it in everyday life. Journalistic accounts about terrorism reflect news organizations’ reliance on official news sources to provide entertaining reports compatible with long established symbols of fear, crime and victimization about threats to individuals and the United States in the “fight against terrorism.” Tying terrorism coverage to an expansive discourse of fear has contributed to the emergence of the politics of fear, or decision-makers’ promotion and use of audience beliefs and assumptions about danger, risk and fear in order to achieve certain goals⁶.

⁶ Altheide, David. *Terrorism and the politics of fear*. New York, Rowman and Littlefield, 2017

Decades of sensationalized news reports and popular culture depictions (e.g., movies) about threat, pervasive risk, and fear took a toll on Americans critical thinking and prepared them for the onslaught of expanded surveillance and reliance on police and military protection that accompanied 9/11. Institutional stories about fear were promoted by social control agencies that regulate our lives in order to protect us. In effect, we began to worship at the altar of terrorism, doing whatever is required to keep us safe. This became commonplace and accepted as part of not just our life, but the nature of reality. Over time, we made allowances for excesses, as we have seen with infringements on civil liberties, such as scrutinizing elderly airport passengers in wheel chairs. Everyday life began to change as surveillance and control efforts were sharpened. The media bombardment seemed to carry the message: “security as salvation.”

Understanding social control and security efforts relies on the participation of the controlled. Consider the airport security ritual—run by the Transportation Safety Agency (TSA)-- where passengers stand in line, take off shoes, open their belongings, and when summoned, even submit to electronic screening and physical pat downs by workers. This work has had questionable effectiveness <https://www.techdirt.com/articles/20120405/04390118385/tsa-security-theater-described-one-simple-infographic.shtml>. The degradation ritual that is enacted, (e.g., standing in line, holding one’s arms out for search, opening up luggage for inspection), precedes getting cleared to proceed, to be selected for inclusion, for being passed, for being allowed to enter the aircraft for one’s journey. The potential passengers participate in order to be selected, but they must give up something, they must demonstrate compliance, indeed, passivity, as they pass through the portal of security, the electronic device(s) that scan their bodies for metal and other substances. These might include x-ray photographs of bodies, visually stripping them of clothing. One camera system was so invasive that the American Civil Liberties Union and the Electronic Privacy Information Center sued the TSA. A tool of electronic detection requires that passengers place their feet on painted foot pads with their hands behind their head, like a position demanded by police officers making an arrest.

One of the most extreme examples of ritualized confiscation followed the announcement that British authorities had arrested several dozen people involved in a plot to blow up international airliners. These attempts included a failed plan by the “shoe bomber” on December 22, 2001 to ignite explosives his shoes. Another failed plot occurred on December 25, 2009 to ignite plastic

explosives in the would-be bomber's underwear, dubbed the "Underwear Bomber." In other failed endeavors, volatile liquids would be carried on board by separate individuals, who would then mix the deadly brew in flight. These attempts, along with expanded control efforts, received extensive news coverage. Almost immediately, liquids, gels, and many personal items were banned from being taken on board. Tens of thousands of items were thrown away or confiscated at the door of security portals during the next few days.

Fear is part of our everyday discourse, even though we enjoy unprecedented levels of health, safety and life expectancy. And now we play with it. More of our play worlds come from the mass media. News reports are merging with TV "reality programs" and crime dramas celebrated in media reports, that in turn provide templates for looking at everyday life. For example, stories of assaults and kidnappings blasted across headlines--even when false or greatly distorted-- make it difficult for frightened citizens to believe that schools are one the safest places in American society. It is becoming more common to even promote hoaxes about child abductions and racial attacks that play out scenarios of danger and fear that audiences assume to be quite commonplace. Researchers find that many of these hoaxes rely on stereotypes of marginalized groups, e.g., poor people and racial minorities⁷. Repetitious news reports that make connections between fear, children, schools, and suspected assailants who fit stereotypes are easy to accept even when they are false.

Media-inspired fear is pervasive in the United States and other countries as well. These experiences prepared citizens to be duped by Russian propagandists' outrageous tales about American politicians during the 2016 Presidential campaign. (Confessore & Wakabayashi, 2017). Americans have grown accustomed to police and security officers on the streets and at numerous public events. Security personnel and ubiquitous cameras are part of everyday experiences in most American cities. A disproportionate amount of attention is focused on profiled—visible minorities and immigrants—both as criminals and as terror suspects. For example, a "stop and frisk" policy in New York City resulted in more than 5 million stops during billionaire Michael Bloomberg's three terms as Mayor. The program focused mainly on black and minority youth, who were nine times as likely to be stopped as white residents, confiscated

⁷ Russell-Brown, Katheryn. "The color of crime: Racial hoaxes, white fear, black protectionism, police harassment, and other macroaggressions." *New York, NY, New York University* (1998).

very few guns or drugs <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/17/nyregion/bloomberg-stop-and-frisk-new-york.html>. Mr. Bloomberg apologized for this policy when he announced his candidacy for President of the United States in November 2019. He justified the policy linking crime reduction with terrorism: “Look at what’s happened in Boston,” Mr. Bloomberg said in 2013. “*Remember what happened here on 9/11*. Remember all of those who’ve been killed by gun violence and the families they left behind.” (My emphasis) The policy was popular with many New Yorkers and was later endorsed by Presidential candidate Donald Trump in 2016. (NYT, above). The appeal was to fear and keeping the public safe.

Questioning and surveillance of minorities and immigrants in everyday life is not limited to the fear-inspired discourse in the United States. Research in Sweden suggests a grim view of Muslim immigrants, who are disproportionately questioned and interrogated. A study of Muslim immigrants found that police, any many members of the public, link them to terrorism (Mulinari, 2019). One interviewee told the researcher:

They [Säpo] (Swedish Security Service) have stolen seven years of my life. They never said: “We are sorry.” . . . If you don’t have blond hair and blue eyes, if you’re a blackhead from the Middle East, then they don’t care about human rights. The law applies differently to us. [...] It’s still a nightmare. When I scream in my sleep, my wife wakes me up. I often panic. (Male informant, 45).

Another male informant explained:

I had been with my aunt. I was stressed and had jogged to the subway. When I was about to pass the turnstile, plain-clothes policemen stopped me: “Where are you going?” “What have you got in the bag?” “Who are you going to meet?” They made me take off my shoes and refused to let me pass until they’d checked my bag. Meanwhile people passed, my aunt’s friends [asked]: “What has he done?” “Is he a terrorist?” (Male informant, 30)

The focus on terrorism and other sources of fear prompted more proactive enforcement, including expanding invasive technological surveillance, as well as infiltration and agent

provocateur actions to provoke and even assist would-be terror agents. Americans were exposed to numerous reports about sting operations to ferret out terrorists. The basic approach is to identify, recruit, and even encourage dissidents who are presumed to be potential terrorists-in-the-making to plan an attack, even to the point of enabling the activities by providing funding, expertise, transportation, and materials. Many of these operations border on entrapment, or the illegal enticement and inclusion of one or more individuals in an illegal action, e.g., building a bomb and delivering it to a target. Only about 30 percent of the first few dozen prosecutions through late 2014 appear to have relied on evidence gathered through undercover operations. That number climbed to about 45 percent by early last year, with a string of undercover prosecutions in New York, Minnesota and Illinois. And since February 2015, about 40 of 60 Islamic State prosecutions, or 67 percent, have been based on undercover operations. (Lichtblau, 2016)

Entrapment via typical sting operations, despite being against the law, appears to be more accepted in the pursuit of efforts to secure convictions for terrorism (Norris, 2019b). One study explained how counterterrorism tactics have become more successful in court and why the entrapment defense often fails.

These include strategic choices by defendants to plead guilty or use other defenses, prosecutorial misconduct, evidence manipulation by informants and police, deficient entrapment doctrines, and procedural irregularities. Consistent with the general trend of counterterrorism law enhancing government power while reducing accountability, the multiple opportunities for authorities to manipulate the legal process leave defendants with little realistic chance of acquittal on entrapment grounds (Norris, 2019a).

The discourse of fear underlying the expanded use of these practices that shift public expectations and tolerance of prosecutorial approaches also benefit local police efforts. All of these efforts are filtered through news reports, popular culture, and social media.

The Propaganda of Fear in Everyday Life

The White House influence on news content was aided by other government and military officials who also dominated news reports about terrorism and fear. Reactions to 9/11 were part of a growing politics of fear. Since September 11, that politics has followed two distinct tracks: First, state officials and media pundits have defined and interpreted the objects of Americans' fears -- Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism -- in anti-political or non-political terms, which has raised the level of popular nervousness; and, second, these same elites have generated a fear of speaking out not only against the war and U.S. foreign policy but also against a whole range of established institutions⁸, including the U. S. military, that continues to receive strong social and media support and public accolades. Numerous news reports and a strong military public relations effort virtually guarantee that any military person who is killed or injured in a combat zone is referred to as a “fallen hero,” regardless of the cause of injury. This is consistent with the symbolic treatment of many public servants who wear uniforms, e.g., police, fire department personnel, etc. The euphemism “first responders” adds symbolic allure to their mundane activities as people protecting us, actual/virtual/potential heroes. Numerous public events, especially sporting events, routinely bless and recognize current military personnel and former veterans, even giving them and their families free admission to sports stadiums. It is commonplace at airports to give military personnel priority-boarding of aircraft, with the obligatory statement, “thank you for your service,” blaring throughout airport terminals. The constant promotion of fear intensified the effort to promote military personnel and has paid dividends for the Department of Defense and the Pentagon. The United States spends more on their defense budget than China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, the United Kingdom, India, France, and Japan combined. Since 9/11 military spending has increased more than 50% (adjusted for inflation), while spending for education, health care, science, etc. have increased just 13.5%). <https://www.nationalpriorities.org/campaigns/how-military-spending-has-changed/> up to 2015's budget of nearly \$600 billion. President Trump requested a 2020 budget of \$740 billion for the Department of Defense and its operations against Islamic State. Adding \$249 billion for other agencies that aid in the DOD's efforts, totals some \$989 billion. In 2003 these components

⁸ Robin, Corey. *Fear: The history of a political idea*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

totaled about \$ 438 billion; <https://www.thebalance.com/u-s-military-budget-components-challenges-growth-3306320>

That there is very little vocal opposition to such increases illustrates how anti-military spending cautions can be treated as being anti-American and anti-security. Popular culture plays to fear as entertainment. Whether crime, disasters, or wars, popular culture formats promote evocative feelings over reflective analysis. The news media have become more ensconced in entertainment via infotainment. (For many audience members, the distinction between “news” and “reality TV” became blurred, especially when Presidential Candidate Donald Trump insisted that critical news reports by established newspapers and TV news organizations about his lies were just made up, “fake news.”) Aiming to please the audiences and key political leaders, news media, and especially major TV networks (with some exceptions) embraced the emotional sweep of 9/11 attacks. Major changes in U. S. foreign and domestic policy essentially went unreported and unchallenged by the dominant news organizations. Notwithstanding the long relationship in the United States between fear and crime, the role of the mass media in promoting fear has become more pronounced since the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001. Qualitative media analysis shows that political decision-makers quickly adjusted propaganda passages, prepared as part of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), to emphasize domestic support for the new U. S. role in leading the world⁹. Politicians marshaled critical symbols and icons joining terrorism with Iraq, the Muslim faith, and a vast number of non-Western nations to strategically promote fear and use of audience beliefs and assumptions about danger, risk and fear in order to achieve certain goals, including expanding domestic social control.

The amplification of political and symbolic attacks on racial, ethnic, and religious minorities through popular culture and an expanding digital media contributed to the effectiveness of Donald Trump’s fear-based campaign for President in 2015. Everyday life activities and public discourse underwent important changes.

⁹ Altheide, David ... Terrorism and the politics... op cit.

The Military-Media Complex and Terrorism

The military-media complex is a feature of programming in an entertainment era dominated by popular culture and communication forms that share sophisticated information technology promoting visual media and evocative content. With the end of the cold war and the development of digitized satellite communications, old hard-fought issues such as military insistence on prior review of copy filed from war zones became obsolete. Reporters roaming war zones equipped with portable satellite equipment are no longer dependent on military facilities to file stories or transmit photographs. Engaged now in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, such as those in Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, and Bosnia, the military have concluded that they must treat the media less as adversaries and more as partners. . .”¹⁰.

“. . .information officers must be ready to take advantage of "media moments" from gauging a reporter's perspective on a story to brushing dandruff off the general's shoulders and, most important, knowing how to get out the "command message": the information or story angle that commanders want the public to know.” (Vogel, 1998 p 6).

The specter of terrorism as preached by numerous politicians promoted reliance on the military, police, and a massive surveillance apparatus. Prior to 9/11 the foundation had been laid for a military incursion into everyday life culture and language. The U. S. military had been criticized after the Vietnam War to such an extent that a kind of offensive was launched to rekindle support and media coverage in the guise of the Military Media Complex, which was a spirited campaign to present positive views about military service and mission.

Only on rare occasions, such as in the waning years of the Vietnam War, did major American media reflect displeasure with foreign policy and military operations. An adversarial relationship with the military was apparent in some media outlets until the 1980s when government censorship and restrictions first separated and then “reintegrated” the media. The Gulf War in 1991, “Desert Storm,” was enthusiastically supported by most media outlets, with celebratory

¹⁰ Topping, Seymour. "The military and the media suspend hostilities." *Columbia Journalism Review* 36.6 (1998): 58.

coverage of well-orchestrated, although often invalid, visuals of dramatic success and “kills,” (e.g., the “impression” that most Patriot missiles hit their targets). The scaled down (“billion dollars special”) four-day version of missile attacks on Iraq in 1998 (“Desert Fox”) was not hindered by Congressional hearings or media generated debates.

The Gulf War media experiences illustrate a pro-military media landscape. TV coverage of the Gulf War with Iraq in 1991 was very important for the resurgence of the military and the military-media connection in this post-journalism era, essentially defined as the blurring of distinctions in perspective and practice by sources and journalists. Despite initial proclamations by media pundits and some academics about media control and censorship, this war contributed to the shared use of entertaining visuals by the Pentagon and the major networks in the United States and throughout the world. Generals and journalists joked as they led global audiences in viewing bomb-sight videos of explosions, “hits,” complete with “oohs” and “ahs” and occasional laughter when, as in one case, a motorist crossed a bridge just moments before it exploded. CNN’s round the clock live coverage of the missile and aerial bombardment of Baghdad helped establish its future role as an important player in international affairs and coverage.

The media-military partnership included shared information technology as well as perspectives on the story, emphasizing weapons and strategies, which required military experts to narrate visuals. “Air time,” or what was allocated to broadcast, emphasized the visuals of armaments, as did newspaper photographs. The dominant frames and themes of the coverage were about technology and weapons. Los Angeles Times’ correspondent George Black (1991 M7) noted in 1991 that news media treated the initial phase of Desert Storm exactly what the military wanted, “a blur of meaningless press conferences, video-game images. . .and the illusion of news.”

Traditionally, experts were used on a case-by-case basis, but the nearly 8 months planning for coverage of the Gulf War suggested a more permanent relationship between sources and journalists.

“To fill in the gaps left by the Pentagon, every network producer has a Rolodex full of military analysts and retired officers, many of them highly paid shills for the arms industry. CNN is perhaps the worst culprit here. In

one egregious case, it turned for an opinion to Richard V. Secord, retired Air Force major general” (Black, 1991 M7)

The Gulf War productions were accompanied by other programs that had an overriding impact on social order and mediated experiences in everyday life.

Everyday Life Adjustments

There is, then, a long history preparing American audiences for entertaining government propaganda about. Terrorism became a more popular topic with Americans after the 9/11 attacks, but there had been mass killings before this, although most of these had not been labelled terrorism. As stressed above, most of the attention has been on foreign based and inspired attacks, such as “radical Islamists,” including those responsible for the 9/11 carnage. But the number of persons killed and injured by foreign-based terrorists is small compared to that of domestic attacks <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/08/right-wing-terrorist-killings-government-focus-jihadis-islamic-radicalism.html>. While the emphasis in this chapter is on everyday life impacts of terrorism and reactions to it, it is important to remember that how terrorism is defined also reflects the politics of everyday life. There are two varieties of terrorist attacks that have had profound influences on everyday life activities and organization: domestic terrorists and school shootings.

Domestic terrorists, largely white supremacists, launched attacks in the United States prior to 9/11, but seldom were these referred to as terrorism, especially if the attacker was a U. S. citizen. For example, the 1995 Oklahoma City federal building bombing by Timothy McVeigh killed 168 people, including 19 children. Analysis of news reports in the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, and Boston Globe shows that the bombing was referred to as terrorism when Muslims were suspected, but McVeigh was cast as a bomber but not as a terrorist.

"This demonstrates that the frame constructed for McVeigh was developed by journalists and not the individuals they interviewed. . . The most frequent descriptors are bombing/bomber, appear 2478 times in the 458 articles.

According to these results Timothy McVeigh and his actions are most often labeled the bomber and the bombing, followed by his description as a militiaman [although he was not a member of a militia organization]. Trailing far behind are terrorism/terrorist and crime/criminal." (Parkin, 2004, p. 14)

The misplaced emphasis on Muslims rather than domestic terrorists was recognized some 15 years:

“For too long, the F.B.I. was myopically targeting Muslims as potential terrorists,” said Faiza Patel, co-director of the Liberty and National Security Program at the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University Law School. “It is now feeling pressure from Congress and the public to address white nationalist violence, so we are seeing a wave of investigations and prosecutions.” (Goldman, 2019)

Clearly, there have been numerous bombings and shootings by domestic terrorists since 9/11. The Department of Homeland Security stated in September 2019 that white supremacists were added to its list of major terrorism threats. And the F. B. I. had 850 open investigations of domestic terrorists. This would add to the fear and precautions of millions of people in their everyday life activities.

Last year, [2018] a spokesperson for the ADL [Anti-Defamation League] testified that 39 out of the 50 extremist-related attacks that took place last year were committed by white supremacists, as opposed to just one instance of a jihadi-related violent attack. In July, FBI director Christopher Wray said in a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing that the FBI had made about 100 domestic terrorism-related arrests since October 2018, “the majority of” which were motivated by some form of “white supremacist violence.” (Dickson, 2019)

Paradoxically, the number of domestic terrorism attacks that have increased since the election of Donald Trump, have led to stronger voices calling for more firearm oversight and restrictions,

while also leading many people to purchase weapons for their religious protection. The growing number of places of worship attacked in 2017-19 have added a new dimension to congregants' everyday life fear—that of being attacked. While such attacks are uncommon, the wide publicity of mass shooting carnage has led to members either arming themselves or hiring professional guards to patrol their services. One example is the Ava Assembly of God in Ava, Missouri.

The men — there are no women on the squad — work in teams of three each Sunday morning, adhering to a schedule that is emailed out every six weeks. Two men are stationed near the church's main entrance, doubling as greeters who shake hands as congregants enter. A third stands at the front of the church, near the pastor. On Wednesday nights, an armed volunteer is on site for teen and adult prayer groups.

“Fifty years ago, you could say no guns should be allowed in church, but times have changed,” said Trampus Taylor, 49, the police chief in Sparta, Missouri, who started the Ava Assembly of God security team. “Shootings happen everywhere.” <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/guns-god-growing-number-churches-want-armed-security-n963031>

Guns in church are becoming more common. On December 29, 2019 two church members killed an attacker who shot two members of the West Freeway Church of Christ in White Settlement, Texas. Texas Governor Greg Abbott asked the state to pray for the victims and their loved ones, adding, “Places of worship are meant to be sacred, and I am grateful for the church members who acted quickly to take down the shooter and help prevent further loss of life.” (Associated Press, The Los Angeles Times, December 30, 2019, p. A8).

Violence against congregants and places of worship has increased. On the same day as the shooting in Texas, a machete-wielding man seriously injured five people at a Hanukkah celebration in Monsey, New York. This followed the vandalizing of a Beverly Hills synagogue in Los Angeles, leading one woman to state her fears and how this was affecting her daily life:

“I’m not sending my young kids to synagogue. I’m keeping them at home with me,” said Natalie, who preferred to be identified only by her middle name because she fears for her family’s safety. Those who attack Jews because of their faith “want people to be afraid to go to synagogue. At the end of the day, I have to protect my children and their lives.... That’s the goal of the terrorist: to instill fear at all times.” (La Ganga & King, 2019).

These adjustments to armed members in their midst are relatively new for religious gatherings, but it is becoming quite common on school grounds. The best-known deadly school shooting occurred at Columbine High School in Denver, Colorado on April 20, 1999, when two students armed with multiple weapons killed 12 students and a teacher, while wounding 21 others. In the nearly twenty-year period (2019) since that shooting, some 236,000 students have experienced numerous school shootings either as injured or as traumatized fellow-students. According to one researcher of the growing trend:

If you look at mass shootings over time, two things are alarmingly clear: The attacks are becoming far more frequent, and they are getting deadlier. . .Our research spans more than 50 years, yet 20% of the 164 cases in our database occurred in the last five years. More than half of the shootings have occurred since 2000 and 33% since 2010. The deadliest years yet were 2017 and 2018, and this year is shaping up to rival them, with at least 60 killed in mass shootings, 38 of them in the last five weeks [prior to Sept. 4, 2019] (Densley & Peterson, 2019).

Many of the shootings have been labeled as terrorist inspired.

This increase has changed everyday life experiences in two fundamental ways. First, many public places, especially shopping malls, theaters, and sporting stadia, have developed more security procedures that take time and hinder entry. And people are more nervous and cautious about many public places, and often support surveillance and control efforts to restrict Muslims. According to one survey: between 33 percent and 61 percent of the respondents agree or strongly agree with policy-related statements that target Muslims as a feared group. More specifically, about 6 in 10 of sample members favor stricter border security policies, and about 1 in 3 subjects

endorse discriminatory policies, including banning immigration from Muslim countries and subjecting Muslims to more scrutiny than other groups. These findings suggest two conclusions. First, a majority of Americans do not want to ban or discriminate against Muslims, but they do want enhanced security at the border so that terrorists can be weeded out. Second, about one third of Americans clearly harbor anti-Muslim views and favor their differential treatment (Haner, et al 2019). (Haner et al., 2019)

Another significant effect concerns school shootings and the widespread response to institute school lockdowns and “active shooter drills,” when students are instructed—and rehearse—locking doors, hiding in closets, and even fighting back. Two students commented on a false threat:

We were in the dark, hiding under desks.’ Alice Meyer, 16, is a junior at High Tech High School, in North Bergen, N.J. She was on campus when her school received this threat in September.

The police were looking for someone they believed had a gun. Our whole school was put on lockdown, no one was sure what was happening. We had no idea if our school was being shot up or if everything was fine.

Another added:

I thought my school’s name would be the next one in the headlines, that my friends would be among the dead and wounded. We were in the dark, hiding under desks, terrified of what would happen next. No gun was found, but that hour and a half was so beyond chaotic and terrifying (Virella & Sedgwick, 2018).

Some students have rebelled against this new everyday life routine, arguing that access to firearms and gun policy is the root cause of the mass shootings in schools. Many students, who survived while 17 classmates were shot to death (and 17 wounded) at Marjory Stoneman High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2018, organized student protests across the United

States to pressure politicians to promote tighter firearm licensing and control. (Two more students would take their own lives within a year of the slaughter.) Their organization, “Never Again MSD,” inspired students internationally to support their efforts (Kramer & Harlan, 2019). Paradoxically, others argued that schools needed more security, and that teachers should receive firearms training and pack weapons in their classrooms.

Conclusion

Terrorism-inspired fear, precautions, surveillance, and security checks are normal in the United States and elsewhere. The reactions to terrorism have been more consequential for everyday life experiences and expectations than actual terrorist acts. Not only is the definition of terrorism problematic, but for decades American officials did not consider domestic terrorism to be as significant a threat as international attacks. Popular culture depictions, including, entertainment and popular movies, expanded fear and provided justification for more social control. Many of the same surveillance technologies that are used to monitor, capture, and guide digital users to entertainment, products, and services are also used to propagandize audiences, and surveil citizens-who-are-potential terrorists¹¹. Still, the fear spreads across familiar everyday practices, routines, and places (Merkovity 2018). The politics of fear and propaganda about a miniscule foreign terrorist threat—especially among immigrants—increases military budgets while obscuring institutionalized violence and neglectful firearms policies that promote gun deaths.

¹¹ Altheide, David L. "Capitalism, hacking, and digital media." *Neoliberalism in Multi-Disciplinary Perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019. 203-227.- Korstanje, Maximiliano E., and Daniel H. Olsen. "The discourse of risk in horror movies post 9/11: hospitality and hostility in perspective." *International Journal of Tourism Anthropology* 1.3 (2011): 304-317.- Marx, Gary T. *Windows into the soul: Surveillance and society in an age of high technology*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2016. Staples, William G. *Everyday surveillance: Vigilance and visibility in postmodern life*. New York, Rowman & Littlefield, 2013.

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