

Neojihadism: Towards a New Understanding of Terrorism and Extremism?

Perceptions of Extremism Among Muslims in Australia

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Abstract

The purpose of the present paper is to ask how Muslims in Australia perceive the existence of extremism in their ranks. Whilst there exists a body of research on the phenomenon of extremism amongst Muslims, a gap has emerged in our understanding of how Muslims themselves perceive extremism in their communities. The present research is based on data collected during 2007 and 2008 among approximately six hundred Muslims living in Sydney, Melbourne and regional Victoria. This sample was asked to respond to the question: "Some people think there has been a rise in extremism among Muslim Australians over recent years, others think extremism is declining—what do you think?" The present paper will analyse responses to that question and discuss whether variables such as age; gender; immigrant status; citizenship status; convert status; employment status; and ancestry impact responses given. In particular, close attention will also be paid to the type and level of extrinsic religious commitment of participants and seek to discover whether these two variables can predict perceptions of the existence of extremism among this sample of Muslims in Australia.

Introduction

Whilst there exists a body of research on the phenomenon of religious and ideological extremism, there exists a gap in our understanding of how adherents themselves view the existence of extremism as a force in their communities. Muslims in particular have received much scholarly and media attention over recent years, but little research has been conducted with a view to discovering what Muslims think about the topic. This paper asks: how do Muslims in Australia perceive the existence of extremism in their ranks? Is it rising, declining, or staying steady? Does religio-political orientation influence how Muslims perceive extremism's direction of movement in their community? Furthermore, what do Muslims themselves have to say on the topic of extremism among their ranks?

Framework of Religio-Political Attitudes

As this paper is interested in how religio-political attitudes influence perceptions, the framework we use in this paper for understanding different Muslim responses to the existence and movement of support for extremism, is a modified form of Abdullah Saeed's (2007) classification of contemporary trends among Muslims. Saeed categorised Muslims in their reactions to modernity, as belonging to the following orientations: legalist

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