

SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLANATION AND RELATIONSHIP OF TERRORISM AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Terrorism and political participation are broadly defined in almost every course of study. The current research article is an attempt to define and explore both terrorism and political participation under the umbrella of sociology and sociological theory. There are mainly three broader perspectives of the sociological theory, like Functionalist perspective, Conflict perspective and Symbolic interactionist perspective and both the terms have been thoroughly analyzed and defined under these basic sociological perspectives. Though academically, both the concepts are moving in the opposite direction, yet there is an intense need to combine them and analyze them with the cover of sociological imagination. The first part of the article comprises theoretical definitions of both the terms with a comprehensive touch of sociological theory and the second part of the article encompasses an attempt to establish an inclusive relationship of both terms. The end part of the article covers the concluding remarks on the basis of definitions of the terms and the establishment of a relationship between both the terms.

Key words: Terrorism, Political Participation, Sociological theory, Functionalist perspective, Conflict perspective and Symbolic interactionist perspective

INTRODUCTION

After the incident of 9/11, the issue of terrorism and peace have gained substantial attention among world nations (Balcells and Espinosa, 2018), and curbing terrorism and promoting peace have been thoroughly linked with dynamic citizenship activities (Miodownik and Nir, 2016) especially among the youth (Fayyaz, 2016). Social and behavioural scientists have the opinion that promotion of active citizenship programs at educational institutes (Davies, 2008; Kuisma, 2008; Hoskins, Janmaat and Villalba, 2012) and at the community level (Benhabib, 2005) will positively decrease the occurrence of terrorism in the developing regions of the world (Balibar, 2010; LaFree, Dugan and Miller, 2015). The majority of the democracies in the developing regions of the globe are highly targeted through the deadly wave of terrorism during the last 2 to 3 decades (Bolognani and Lyons, 2011; Squire, 2015). On the other side, terrorism influenced the developed part of the world both politically and economically (Pain, 2014) and it became a burning issue for the actors (lawmakers and political parties) within the democratic setup (Boyle and Mower, 2018). In simple words, for both the technologically advanced countries and less developed nations, terrorism has been linked with state activities (Liu and Guan, 2019), i.e. the rise or decline of terrorist and violent activities was either considered as the failure or success of the state authorities respectively (Muller et al., 2017).

Political activism is the backbone of the democracy (Furlong and Cartmel, 2012; Seo, 2017), through which the selection process would be accomplished in the shape of polling the votes (Welzel and Inglehart, 2008) and the existence of participation-based and citizenship type (Whitely, 2014; Huddy, Mason and Aaroe, 2015) of state government. Different countries have different types of democratic systems with various issues and consequences. After the collapse of the twin towers in New York during 2001, the issue of terrorism has gained much more importance and popularity throughout the world nations (Bevir and Brown, 2019), while inter-state and inter-regional affairs have been

calculated on the basis of measurements (Wittendorp, 2016), level of occurrence the terrorist events (Sandler, 2014) and taking steps for combating the terrorism (Richards, 2017). All over the world, including Pakistan, the state authorities were busy formulating anti-terrorism and counter-terrorism strategies (Shahzad, Sarwar, Farooq and Qin, 2020), rules, and laws for contending the terrorism (Heath-Kelly and Strausz, 2019; Dresser, 2018; Ahmed, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

The current research work is based on qualitative approach and secondary data including the sociological definitions and description of the term's terrorism and political participating available in various research and reference write-ups. A number of recent published articles were also taken under consideration for conceptualization and previous research done regarding definitions and inter-relationship of the term's terrorism and political participation. Preference was given to most recent published and available research.

TERRORISM

The concept of terrorism has received significant attention in the last three decades. Though it is a method of political conflict for a very long time, different features of terrorism are continuously discussed in various fields of social sciences, from Economics to Anthropology and further from Philosophy to Sociology (Wenzlaff, 2017). With a little more explanation for defining terrorism, Randahl, (2016) stated that there are around 200 different definitions of terrorism, having their own problems and preconceptions connecting to either validity or reliability. One way to increase the reliability of the definition, however, is looking only at the nature of the individual events, regardless of the actors who commit the action (Bjørge, 2005, Richards, 2014). The definition of terrorism on the basis of events i.e. terrorist events is presented by the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) at the University of Maryland, which identifies deliberate and violent acts by non-state actors and categorizes them either these are terrorist acts or not. In the classification and consideration of a terrorist act, the event must fulfill two out of three criteria. These criteria are:

1. The action must aim to achieve a political, economic, religious or social objective.
2. There must be proof that the act is intended to convey a message to a wider audience, intimidate or transmit as the direct victims.
3. Action should be outside the context of legitimate war.

Sociological Explanation of Terrorism

Boyns and Ballard, (2004) explained their analysis in developing a sociological theory, an explanation of terrorism and stated that sociologically, the term 'terrorism' is defined as it is a powerful response to powerlessness. More explicitly, terrorism is the violent response to the hegemonic dominance and an attempt to reduce this dominant hegemony through creating a counterhegemonic movement, as an alternate political setup. This definition highlighted a shared relationship in society between those who are exercising the socio-political power and those with no or less power, showing the imbalances of power between these opposite groups and their struggle for achieving ideological, political, religious, and symbolic status over social relations. Drawing brief attention and explanation to the work of Goffman (1959), Alexander (2004) has the opinion that the act of terrorism is not only aimed politically but also having some important symbolic dimensions and these acts of terrorism are dramaturgically pre-organized reflecting some basic cultural scripts through structural and symbolic codes. Keeping in view this explanation, it is assumed that terrorism and terrorist attacks are fundamentally the symbolic ones, which spread the fear component among the masses by a unique phrase as, "kill one [fearlessly] and frightened hundreds" (Collins, 2004).

Functionalist perspective of Terrorism

Defining and explaining terrorism sociologically under the umbrella of functionalist perspective, Cinoğlu and Özeren, (2011) stated that the founders and prominent functionalists in the field of sociology like Durkheim and Merton explained society as a living organism and have the opinion that normality and equilibrium are the major building blocks of the society and important factors of social life (Giddens, 1972). Any deviations and unconventionality towards the normality and equilibrium within society lead towards the social shock (Merton, 1957) and the society have either the capability of recovering from these social shocks immediately or slowly (Gordon, 2005), or with no capability and converted to a new and innovative structure with known and identified functions. Functionalists

considered terrorism and the incident of September 11, 2001, in the United States as the social shock (Black, 2004), whereas, the normality and equilibrium of social life were highly disturbed not only within the United States but also in the entire world. Various laws and departments were formulated for counter-terrorism in developed and developing parts of the globe so that the disturbed equilibrium and normality would reinstate to its normal position (Turk, 2004).

Conflict perspective of Terrorism

Though founders of the conflict perspective like Marx and Engels have no or very limited contribution towards the concepts of terrorism and militancy due to fact that these social problems did not exist in their times (Stevens, 2005) but they have focused on vulnerability, marginalization, and class-suppression in terms of commodity production and resource ownership on the basis of two class theory in the society (Schwartz, 2009). As a foundation and baseline work, later on, the researchers developed a more comprehensive approach to conflict and stress within the societies that not only over commodity ownership and utilization of resources the conflict exists but achieving political power, identity crises, and cultural hegemony are also some dominant factors of conflict. The well-known and prominent 20th-century sociologist, C. Wright Mills (1916 – 1962) in his book *The Power Elite* (1956) explained the triangular of democratic governments, business corporates and military composed the power elite and a ruling class within a modern society. All these three groups control the society for their own interests' mainly economic dominancy and political controls and not for the interest of the public, resulting in the emergence of social movements and small militant groups. With the development and enhancement of military industry, the occurrence of war among world nations increases, and war become a profitable business including selling and buying of arms and ammunitions and defeating and encouraging various militant groups. Acquiring imperialism at local, national, and international levels also promote the emergence of militants and terrorism at different levels among world nations (Worrell, 2013).

Symbolic Interactionist perspective of Terrorism

Symbolic interactionist perspective in sociology deals at a micro-level approach in a society where individuals develop face-to-face interaction and share meanings, assumptions, and the objective reality from the real intentions of others (Dennis, 2011). Yeager, (2016) explained that there are three basic assumptions and core principles for the explanation of symbolic interaction theory, (i) individuals in society make interaction through objects with derived meanings, (ii) the meanings of these objects have continuously become the production of that communication and (iii) the objective meanings are not fixed (Ganor, 2002) and would be changed with time and space (Blumer, 1980). Deviance, crime and the renowned form of these two as terrorism widely elaborated as a symbolic entity and an objective reality, through which a small number of individuals threatened a large scale of audiences, to attain some socio-political goals and maintain ideology and identity realism (Markova, 2007) as per the definition of terrorism (Tosini, 2007). Since the incident of September 11, 2001 terrorism and terrorist activities become the socially constructed phenomena (Kilby, 2015) and an objective reality throughout the world, for which various steps have been taken including strengthening the security agencies (Miller, 2005) like Police and paramilitary forces and developing laws for anti-terrorism and counterterrorism (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2011).

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation is defined as a visible, actual, and concrete process (Zukin, et al., 2007) and also as an activity or an action through which the public has the right to express their political views (Van-Deth, 2016). Defining political participation is more easy and clear when some basic features (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013) are understood such as sitting idle and watching Television or having a deep interest in politics never comes under the umbrella of political participation (Klandermans, et al., 2014). Secondly, it is also assumed that political participation is voluntary in its nature and not ordered by the state as a responsibility and liability (Bennett, 2012). Thirdly, the actors who played an important role in the process of political participation are observed as non-professionals and amateurs (Callahan, 2007).

Defining and explaining the term 'political participation' Rooij, (2012) and Niessen & Huddleston, (2009) stated that it includes a number of activities which are engaging the public in general politics like the fulfilment of the voting process and showing or highlighting their political affiliations in terms of participating in gatherings of political parties, joining associations, showing interest in public debates at public places and taking an active part in civil disobedience (Just and Anderson, 2012).

Further explaining the political participation in terms of dividing the term, it is common to distinguish between conventional and non-conventional political participation (Koopmans, Michalowsk and Waibel, 2012), like voting and being an active member of a political party and/or political association come under the umbrella of conventional political participation while engaging himself in boycotts and civil disobedience covers the non-conventional political participation (Ziemele, 2005).

Sociological explanation of political participation

Within the sociological framework, political participation and its types have been broadly and extensively discussed in the theoretical field of political sociology, as a sub-field of classical and contemporary sociology (Blokker, Eranti and Vieten, 2020). Consequently, for understanding and explaining the concept of political participation under the cover of sociology, it is, first needed to study briefly the core thoughts of political sociology (Tilly and Sidney, 2006). Political sociology is defined as the relationship between state and society (Brincker, 2013). It reflects the relationship between political institutions and other social institutions (Nash, 2010). It is an intersection of sociology and political science and plays the role of a bridge between these two broad disciplines. The area of interest for political sociologists is the study of the nature of power and the state, the social movements, relationships of state with society, civil participation and political organization, citizenship and voting behaviour, and political culture (Orum and Dale, 2008). Political participation is an important research area in the field of political sociology because it debates the fundamental aspects of politics and the power dynamics within society and state development. Research in political participation raised so many questions for political sociologists (Walker, 2008; Dalton, 2008; Miller, 2009) including that what is the nature of individual and group participation in the political decision-making process at the community level? Either the nature of participation is equal or having some latent diversity for various social groups in society? Is the participation of individuals fruitful and resulted or just the name of a process and nothing else?

Functionalist perspective of political participation

Explaining political participation under the umbrella of the functionalist perspective within the sociological framework, Swaner, (2017) has the opinion that political participation is the function of the democratic process, whereas, democracy is an important element for the smooth functioning of modern and contemporary societies. The democratic systems in the entire world need the functions of the decision-making process, collective well-formation bodies, and empowered inclusion of individuals (Mansbridge et al, 2012). These basic and complementary functions can only be fulfilled through the political participation of individuals in every particular region, followed by an identified democratic system (Dryzek, 2009). The most important function of democratic systems is the decision-making process (voting), which is, ultimately the fundamental concept and basic notion of political participation (Font, Smith, Galais and Alarcon, 2018). The functionalist model elaborated that citizenship and political participation of individuals are essential factors for maintaining social order in society (Stutzer and Frey, 2006). The democratic state has a system of policymaking that might be directly or indirectly influenced through the process of political participation (Jaske, and Setala, 2019) (voting, organizing and/or protesting, etc). When such a sort of participation considered indispensable and meaningful to the system, the state operates in an effective manner, and the equilibrium of power established through individuals' participation, self-governs, and decision-making ability. Hence, social order and equilibrium well-maintained in a democratic society (Swaner, 2017; Schaub, 2012).

Conflict perspective of political participation

Another well-known and popular sociological paradigm through which the researchers can dig out and explain various terms is the conflict perspective, also known as Marxism or Marxist perspective, due to the highly academic contribution of the German philosopher Karl Marx (Foster, 2010). In the early days, the conflict perspective was narrowly defined as the unequal and imbalanced distribution of wealth among the members of the contemporary and industrialized societies, whereas the upper class has the dominancy over the economic resources and the working class is being exploited by these elites through various ways (Hanieh, 2010). Elaborating the concept of political participation under the conflict perspective, Ralf Dahrendorf (1929 – 2009) a well-known German sociologist has the opinion that there is a clear distinction between ordinary citizens and the elite class, whereas, the ordinary citizens have no role in decision making at the policy level (Kuhne, Weber and Berr, 2019). They (the ordinary citizens or the middle class) have only the basic right to vote, yet these people have completely deprived by the elite class of the essential decision-making process.

Dahrendorf in his writings quoted that “the ordinary citizens are not supposed to be the suppressed class of the society, but keeping deprived of important political and policy decision-making process, seems like they are the subjected class” (Meifort, 2019). Within the process of political participation, there is always a conflicting component present among those who had controlled the process and those who wish to control and overcome the process (Jenkins and William, 2005). Dahrendorf further explained and opposed Marx's clarification of conflict which is primarily based on economic factors. Comparatively, the concept of conflict in contemporary and industrialized societies is based on the phenomena of competing political groups for attaining power and authority over some time (Lepsius, 2010). Political conflict among various political groups (parties) sometimes leads towards the bloody clash between their supporters and followers during the time of elections and voting also highlights the component of conflict in a society (Li and David, 2008). The factor of protest as non-conventional political participation by the opposition parties against the ruling party further highlighted and empower the concept of social conflict in democratic societies, where they (the opposition parties) claimed the protest as their fundamental human right.

Symbolic perspective of political participation

Carter and Fuller, (2016) have the opinion that the term ‘Symbolic Interactionism’ was first coined by Herbert Blumer during the 1950s and introduced the concept of social behaviourism to sociological theory and research, based on Mead’s philosophical thoughts. Symbolic interactionists have the idea that individuals in the society are acting and communicating with each other through subjective symbols with their objective meanings (Arzy, Molnar and Blanke, 2008). In the process of communicating individuals, a society has four different concepts through which the theoretical and methodological viewpoint of symbolic interactionism would be fulfilled (Clarkson et al, 2015). These are, i) the self, ii) meaning, iii) action, iv), and interaction. Explaining and elaborating the concept of political participation within the framework of symbolic interactionism, it is worth mentioning to note that the whole structure of political participation is composed of various symbols (Federico, and Ekstrom, 2018) through which individuals are communicating with each other inside the democratic process (Devine, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, the symbols carried out in the process of political participation have their subjective reality and objective meaning, with their identified concepts of self, meaning, action, and interaction (Ellis and Stimson, 2012; Federico, Deason and Fisher, 2012). Although a distinctive feature is there among the elite groups (who are struggling for political power) and common voters (who are just using their vote), both are the most active participants in the democratization process using various symbols (Lupia, 2015; Johnston, Lavine and Federico, 2017). As a subject matter of symbolic interactionism in the theoretical perspective of political sociology, the interactionists have little interest in exploring large groups like governments and its subparts of the judiciary and other administrative bodies, rather they have a great interest in studying small groups, its components and interaction that have been made through actors within the groups and outside the groups (Denzin, 2007). Political participation is overall the combination of internal and external interaction between individuals and groups. This interaction is made through various symbols assigned to various political parties and other independent groups which have subjective reality and objective meaning (Burke and Stets, 2009; Heise, 2007).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TERRORISM AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

After defining both the terms under the cover of sociological theory, the next part is to establish and elaborate the relationship between terrorism and political participation. By relating, it is aimed to (i) highlight how much these two are affecting each other in various parts of the globe, and (ii) to explain how these two terms are interdependent on each other. Balcells and Espinosa, (2018) attempted to explore the electoral consequences of terrorist attacks by using a natural experiment in Spain while taking into consideration the terrorist attacks during the era from 1989 to 1997 on various segments of the society including civilians, politicians and security agencies (Police and Military). Findings of the said research highlighted that terrorist attacks increased the political participation of the public and no decrease in electoral activities or fear of terrorist attacks among the public was recorded. Huddy and Feldman, (2011) have conducted research on how Americans respond politically to the terrorist incident of 9/11. The researchers have the opinion that those who were not affected directly have shown deep anger to the terrorist groups and in favour of state security and foreign policy regarding military

operations, inside and outside the United States, while those who were the directly affected exposed concerns over state policy about military operations. Because the latter part of the population has some anxiety about future attacks of the same nature. Findley and Joseph, (2011) have an intended idea about relating terrorism and political culture in such a way that democracy and political culture motivate domestic terrorism so that public build-up pressure on the government to make some changes in policy both internal and external.

For a long, the developing part of the globe like Pakistan is experiencing a transition period of democracy due to so many factors, in which terrorism is also one of them. The political participation and enhancement of democratic culture have a significant role in the process of transition to democracy. There was an intense need for improvement of democratic culture and encouragement of political participation under the vicious shield of terrorism especially in the post 9/11 era when Pakistan was playing a frontline role in destabilizing domestic and transnational terrorism through the assessment of western international democratic states (Oates, Kaid, & Berry, 2010). Andersen and Brym, (2017) have conducted the same kind of research while establishing a deep-rooted relationship between democracy, public participation and terrorism in Tunisia. The researchers have the opinion that democracy in Tunisia is directly or indirectly exposed by some factors, like political divisions, economic instability and terrorism. The study further explained that after the terrorist attacks in 2015, Tunisian people have less optimistic towards democracy and state policy regarding overcoming the issue of terrorism. This shows a negative effect of terrorism on the political participation of the Tunisian public so that showing a decrease and less curiosity towards democracy.

Bateson, (2012) has the opinion that political participation of the masses across the UK observed at a high point when there is an increase in violent activities especially the events of terrorism had a great role in expanding and exploring the political participation of the public (Karabulatova, Barabash and Kotelenets, 2018). There is an impact of terrorist events on electoral outcomes during the high voltage of political scenario which highlighted that sometimes people have been motivated to boost their voter preferences for the right-wing political parties instead of liberals and most of the times voters support those political parties who become the targets and victims of terrorist attacks. (Vasilopoulos, 2017; Robins et al., 2013; Berrebi and Klor, 2008). A study was conducted to analyze voter's response towards the terrorist incident which has been occurred on 22nd July 2011 in Norway (Thoresen et al, 2012), through which it was observed that the terrorist attack was carried out by an extremist group having the right-wing political ideology (Sinkkonen, 2016). Findings of the under discussion study shows that voters have changed their preference in the upcoming general elections of 2013 and the results of the elections, according to the study, demonstrates that right-wing political parties have a significant decrease of voters in terms of voter's turnout. The study also determines that there is a non-significant relationship between terrorist events and voter's turnout, explaining that the terrorist event didn't decrease the voter's turnout (Robbins, Hunter and Murray, 2013).

In a report published during 2016 by SALTO Youth Cultural Diversity Resource Centre, it has been observed that during various terrorist attacks in 2015 – 16 across Europe, the policymakers have intended the existing governments to engage the youth in political and civic activities because of the fact that youth population has a greater impact and effective role in peacebuilding (Janmaat, 2016). During and after the terrorist wave in 2015 – 16, numerous research was conducted on the socio-psychological effects of terrorism on youth and it was observed that the majority of college-going students who usually come under the definition of youth have been badly affected (Henn, Oldfield and Hart, 2017). One of the solutions and recommendations to overcome the worst effects of terrorism and for convalescence and reintegration was to reengage the youth in civic and political activities (Curtice and Simpson, 2018). Researchers have the opinion that in developed countries, the overall population and specifically the youth have very minor attention towards the elections, voting process, and political participation (Sloam, 2016) and they are considering all these activities as routine matters. But after the terrorist incidents in the first and second decades of the 21st century, there is an intense need for civic and political engagement of the public (Pontes, Henn and Griffiths, 2018).

CONCLUSION

After the comprehensive discussion, it is concluded that like other academic disciplines and terms, terrorism and political participation have also sociological meaning and explanation. Available research and literature highlighted that there is an in-depth relationship exist between these two terms. In the

majority of the cases, both the terms were used as dependent and independent variables for the sake of analysis of the collected data. The existing research work is an attempt to present new ways of exploration and assessment of knowledge for graduates in the field of sociology and political science.

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