

Causes of terrorism

Most definitions of terrorism recognise that terrorists don't just pursue violence for the sake of it but have a specific purpose for carrying out their attacks.

Individuals or groups may use terrorism because they don't like the current organisation of society and they want to change it. They may believe that violence, or the threat of violence, will coerce society into making a change.

Throughout history many terrorists have stated that they turned to violence after long deliberation, because they felt they had no other choice.

Research has shown that there are a number of possible causes for terrorist activity. These include:

- **Social and political injustice** – Some people turn to terrorism when they are trying to tackle what they perceive as social injustice. Terrorists acting on this basis may believe that they have been stripped of something they feel entitled to such as certain rights, land or possessions.
- **Religious beliefs** – Throughout history, religious causes have been the motivation for a variety of terrorist attacks, though it is important to remember that religions themselves do not cause terrorism. Religious terrorists may use terrorism to punish what they see as 'ungodly' behaviour in society, or to avenge what they perceive as attacks on their beliefs.

Religious terrorism is not always about one faith attacking another. Divisions between Protestant and Catholic Christians or Shia and Sunni Muslims have also led to terrorist attacks through the ages.

- **Ideological beliefs** – Some groups use terrorism to try and further the cause of an ideology they believe in. This needn't be a political or religious ideology. Animal rights activists, 'eco-terrorists' and racist groups have all used violence directed at individuals and property in the name of their beliefs.
- **Socio-economic factors** – Research has shown that deprivation (poverty, lack of education, lack of political freedom) can drive people to terrorism. It is believed that people in these situations may be more susceptible to recruitment by organisations using terrorist tactics.

Reflective questions

- *What non-violent means can be used to tackle injustices? Why don't terrorists use these?*
- *Why might people living in deprivation be more susceptible to being recruited by terrorists?*
- *Can you think of historical or present-day examples of each of the causes of terrorism listed above?*