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The Boston bombs and the new face of terror

The man behind last month's marathon atrocities is said to have 'self-radicalised'. Is this part of a trend of 'lone wolf' terrorism?

Class questions

- How would students define terrorism?
- Is violent protest ever justified? Ask students to explain their reasoning.
- What is an acceptable and democratic way of monitoring potential terrorist threats?
- What degree of invasion of privacy is justified to keep us safe? Debate.
- How should the press report terrorist activities? What kind of language should be avoided so as not to encourage religious hatred or hate crimes?

THE BOMBS that killed three people and injured more than 200 others at the Boston Marathon in the US last month were set off by two brothers, one disenchanted with America and the other apparently following his lead.

Tamerlan (pictured, left) and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev had emigrated to the US from Dagestan, Russia, in 2002 but had failed to integrate, although Dzhokhar, who was more religiously moderate, had seemed happy and well adjusted at university.

Tamerlan, 26, died in a shoot-out days after the bombing. His younger brother, 19, has been charged with using a weapon of mass destruction and is scheduled to appear in court on 30 May. The crime carries the death penalty. Although this was abolished in the state of Massachusetts almost 30 years ago, it still exists in the federal courts where Dzhokhar will be tried.

The laws governing the trial of a terrorist differ from those in a civilian court, and there was some debate over whether Dzhokhar should be tried as an "enemy combatant", which would have limited his human rights. (He would not, for example, have been permitted access to a lawyer.) The state eventually decided to try him as a US citizen.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation defines terrorism as "the unlawful use of force and violence...in furtherance of political or social objectives".

But what do we know of the brothers' motives? And what does this atrocity tell us about modern terrorism? Tamerlan

had been on the US government's Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment list for 18 months but had not been deemed a serious threat.

The brothers appear to have acted alone, without the support of any outside extremist groups, prompting concern about what authorities say is a growing trend of "lone wolf" terrorist attacks. Perpetrators may sympathise with the ideology of a particular organisation yet have no direct contact with them, making it difficult for authorities – more used to hunting cells, or groups, of terrorists – to detect them as a threat.

Experts tracking Tamerlan's path to Islamic fundamentalist extremism say that he appears to have "self-radicalised", using YouTube videos and information found on the internet.

Yet some claim that self-radicalisation is not a new phenomenon. Marc Sageman, a former Central Intelligence Agency operations officer who now acts as a political violence consultant to the US government, says: "The huge majority – 90 per cent – of plots in the West since the 1990s have come from people who decide to do it on their own and who don't have links with the outside."

A recent, high-profile case of "lone wolf" terrorism was that of Anders Breivik, who murdered 77 people, mainly adolescents, in Norway in 2011 when he bombed government buildings in Oslo and opened fire on a Labour Party youth camp. He later claimed that his actions were a protest against mass immigration. ●

AP/REUTERS

TERRORISM, RISK AND RELIGIOUS TENSIONS

HISTORY

The ultimate penalty

A legal document from ancient Babylonia (in present-day Iraq) contained the first known death penalty laws under a code written in the 18th century BC. Twenty-five crimes were punishable by death, including adultery and helping slaves to escape, but murder was not one of them.

In 14th-century England, a person could be executed for a crime as trivial as disturbing the peace. Three centuries later, when the first colonists arrived in what is now known as America, they brought the British penal system with them. Treason was punishable by death, as was murder, rape, heresy and witchcraft.

Britain abolished the death penalty in 1965, except for crimes such as treason and piracy, and it was abolished entirely in 1998. But the death penalty still exists in 32 US states. Methods of execution and the crimes subject to the penalty vary by jurisdiction. In 2012, 43 inmates were executed in America and 3,146 were on death row.

According to the Amnesty International charity, 140 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. But in 2012, 58 countries imposed death penalties and 21 countries were confirmed to have carried out executions.



THE CHAIR: This chair executed 361 Texan prisoners during 1924-64.

GETTY/ALAMY

MATHEMATICS



Dead certainties

What are the chances of being killed by a shark? How about being struck by lightning? Or, perhaps most terrifying of all, being the victim of a terrorist attack?

Challenge and entertain your students by using data to calculate risk and to see how often things go fatally wrong.

Take, for example, a tandem skydive, where you are strapped to an instructor and jump out of a plane at 10,000ft for 45 seconds of free fall at 120mph. Statistician David Spiegelhalter, writing in UK magazine *Radio Times*, estimated that the risk of the jump was around 7 micromorts, a micromort being the unofficial name for a one-in-a-million chance of death. He calculated that it was the same as riding 40 miles on a motorbike, 100 miles on a bicycle or running a marathon.

Spiegelhalter then worked out that a middle-aged man like him had around a 7,000-micromort risk of dying within the next year, so the skydive would make little difference. "Off I went happily and jumped out of the plane," he wrote. "Or more accurately, was pushed." He is now saving up to swim with sharks.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Conflicts of faith

Despite the 9/11 terror attacks and the recent Boston bombing, relatively little religious conflict has taken place in the US, even though it is so religiously diverse.

With the arrival of Europeans, many of whom were fleeing religious persecution, diverse religious groups established themselves in America, colony by colony. Anglicans populated Virginia, Puritans settled in Massachusetts and Quakers put down roots in Pennsylvania.

But in the time around the Revolutionary War (1775-83) fierce fighting took place between religious groups. In 1771, a Virginia sheriff grabbed a Baptist preacher from the pulpit, delivering 20 lashes with a horsewhip. In the 1840s, gun battles broke out between Native Americans and Irish Catholics in Philadelphia, quelled only by martial law. At the end of that century, a wave of anti-Semitism began to grow in the US, reaching its peak during the Great Depression in the 1930s.

Today, Islam has surpassed Judaism as the US's second largest religion. After 9/11, the Federal Bureau of Investigation found that anti-Muslim sentiment had spiked. Hate crime against Muslims grew 1,600 per cent on the previous year.



Related resources

- Consider terrorism throughout history with *Daryn Simon's* presentation. What is terrorism, what are the consequences and how might it be prevented? bit.ly/TerrorismDebate
- Challenges students' preconceptions about terrorists with a lesson from the 9/11 Education Programme. bit.ly/DealingWithTerrorism
- Stimulate a debate about capital punishment and encourage students to investigate a range of personal and religious views. bit.ly/DebatingDeath
- A resource from *joanne harris* asks whether religion is a cause of conflict or a source of peace. bit.ly/ReligiousConflict

Further resources

- Students consider risk and consequence in *Colin Billett's* activity on statistics and the probability of risk. bit.ly/ProbabilityofRisk
- Have fun with probability using games and puzzles from TESConnect mathematics expert Craig Barton. bit.ly/ProbabilityGames
- Evaluate the impact of terrorism and explore possible solutions in an activity-packed lesson focusing on identity cards. bit.ly/SolutionsToTerrorism
- Introduce your class to the basics of news writing in *TESEnglish's* activity. bit.ly/NewsReportWriting
- *EmmyCD's* lesson considers how news stories are reported and why some are given more prominence than others. bit.ly/NewsValues