



PBS NEWSHOUR

STUDENT REPORTING LABS

Lesson 2.3 Fact vs Opinions: Worksheet D

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The Dangers of Sen. Rand Paul's Argument Against Terrorism

Terrorism affects people of all ethnicities, nationalities and religious creeds. It is the ubiquity of terrorism that makes it especially difficult to combat--the debilitating effects of terrorism do not heed differences. Once a car bomb detonates, its destruction is indiscriminate--its only limitation is the radius of its impact.

Part of why it is in a nation's public interest to deter terrorism is *because* it impacts so many aspects of society--businesses, religious communities and our common sense of security are some of these.

This is largely why I take issue with a [speech](#) that [Sen. Rand Paul \(R-KY\)](#) made on Friday at the annual [Values Voters Summit](#). Most concerning among his talking points was the argument that the United States, by means of its allocation of international aid in conflict-ridden areas such as Syria and Egypt, is "giving comfort and aid" to crimes against Christians.

This sort of conspiratorial language is problematic in and of itself. The fact that Sen. Paul began with speaking about the American diplomatic role in Syria and then used examples of domestic attacks on American society (a mere 6,000 miles away) as fodder for the same argument is less than satisfactory. However, I am even more disheartened by the sentiments that abet Sen. Paul's speech, which are exclusionary in nature.

Religious persecution, in any form, is unequivocally deplorable. In his speech, Sen. Paul conflates acts of terrorism perpetrated by extremist Muslims clearly directed toward Christians (both foreign and

American) with those that were not, all under the pretense that they constitute a "war against Christians." To categorize an attack such as the Boston bombings as an affront to Americans "as a Christian people," as Sen. Paul did, completely mischaracterizes an attack whose effects were felt by the entire American population, irrespective of religious tradition. Americans of all religious backgrounds mourned the tragedy, and intently desired justice to be exacted on the perpetrators of the crime. This sort of rhetoric not only slights victims (who may or may not have been religious), but it also fallaciously posits that individuals who are American *and* Christian must be especially concerned by terrorism. Politicians should not have to justify addressing terrorism by enumerating its effects on *one* subset of the American population. The fact that individuals are willing to harm any and all Americans should be enough information to inspire action.

An attempt such as this to boil the complicated and nuanced issue of terrorism down to a single motivation (such as Christian-specific persecution) precludes all justifications for governmental action, other than on the premise that attacks against American Christians are occurring, from being considered. What about those who subscribe to other religious beliefs? What about those who subscribe to no beliefs at all? Is their security of a secondary concern, regardless of whether they are citizens of the same nation?

Beyond this puzzling logic is Sen. Paul's contradictory stance on Islam. During his speech, Sen. Paul accurately states that most Muslims do not support the Muslim extremists who committed the acts to which he is referring. However, in reference to the assassination attempt of Malala Yousafazi (who, as he notes, is not Christian), he asks why those members of Islam who do not sympathize with Muslim extremists have yet to "stand up and condemn this."

It is unclear whether "this" refers specifically to the attack against Malala or the position that extremists have taken on the education of women on a larger scale. Regardless of this ambiguity, however, it seems that Sen. Paul failed to consult statements such as [these](#). These are, after all, explicit condemnations of both the attack on Malala and Muslim extremism coming from the very mouths of those Muslims who Sen. Paul claims have failed to condemn extremism.

Despite this important discrepancy between Sen. Paul's claims and reality, Sen. Paul's proposition that "Islam must police Islam" implies that the international Muslim community is accepting of extremism, which contradicts his note that most Muslims object to acts of terrorism justified by Muslim extremists.

In this sense, Sen. Paul's stance on combatting terrorism is not a delineated one. He advocates that the United States ought to refrain from granting aid or intervening militarily in tempestuous regions as proactive steps toward mitigating religious extremism, but then proposes that the best course of action is to passively hope that mainstream Muslims chide extremist Muslims (something that is already occurring).

All that is clear is that Sen. Paul despises religious persecution and terrorism. However, the arguments he cites to arrive at this position are demeaning and ultimately exclusionary. Like most people, I too oppose religious persecution and terrorism. However, I don't believe that I must frame terrorism, which affects multitudes of people, as a "war against Christians" to encourage action. Instead, I oppose religious persecution and terrorism on the premise of their very principles--as dangerous to human dignity, world stability and progress.

