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Incel Violence: a Terrorism Classification Debate

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Abstract

This essay explores whether violence perpetrated by individuals identifying as “involuntary celibates” (incels) should be classified as terrorism. Using academic and governmental definitions of terrorism, it establishes a framework to evaluate incel violence. Findings show that incel violence aligns with key characteristics of terrorism, including ideological motivation, the intent to influence a broader audience, and the use of violence to achieve political or social objectives. Case studies such as the Isla Vista and Toronto attacks illustrate parallels between incel violence and traditional terrorism. Recognizing incel violence as terrorism enables more accurate threat assessments and targeted counterterrorism strategies. The study argues that broadening the definition of terrorism to include gender-based ideological extremism is necessary to reflect the evolving nature of global terrorism and ensure policy frameworks adequately address emerging threats.

Keywords: Incels, Terrorism, Gender-Based Violence, Ideological Extremism, Radicalization