Terrorist Attacks Knit Communities Together, According to New Research

March 22, 2019

The Australian man accused of last Friday’s massacre at a New Zealand mosque stated bluntly in his white-supremacist manifesto that he hopes to start a race war. New research, though, suggests that his monstrous act is more likely to result in a more connected, compassionate citizenry.

An analysis of Twitter messages by French citizens following a 2015 terrorist attack in Paris found that “a collective negative emotional response” was followed by a long-term increase in expressions of social solidarity.

“These findings suggest that it is not despite our distress that we are more united after a terrorist attack,” write David Garcia of the Medical University of Vienna and Bernard Rimé of the University of Louvain.* “It is precisely because of our shared distress that our bonds become stronger, and our society adapts to face the next threat.”

The study, just published in the journal Psychological Science, analyzed the Twitter messages of 62,114 French subscribers to the social media network. All had tweeted responses to the November 13th, 2015, terrorist attack on the office of the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo. Most of the tweeters lived in Paris, the site of the attack, but others were scattered around the nation.