POLS 429: International Terrorism
Lecture 20 (03.02.2020):
Suicide Terrorism Vol. 2

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Overview

1. Quick review

2. Theoretical Approaches

3. Policy

4. Extra Material

Review

WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- Global increase in volume and lethality.
- Strategic approach: suicide as a rational choice.
- Organizational approach: suicide as a result of inter-group competition and ensure survival.

Questions??

Explaining Suicide Terrorism

IDEOLOGICAL APPROACH

- Suicide terrorism $\rightarrow$ a symbolic act (moral/spiritual).
- Salient for both the constituency and target population.
- Evidence: justify and rationalize attacks.
- Religious aspect: manipulations of texts, or re-framing the meanings of terms (martyrdom, suicide and jihad).

Ideological approach

RESEARCH

- Why Ideological suicide terrorism? early adopters (Hezbullah).
- 9.11 attackers $\rightarrow$ members of AQ (Salafi Islam).
- Correlation between suicide bombing and specific religious beliefs (Horowitz et al. 2015).

- Religious differences between terror group and its target:
  - Intensify nationalist and sectarian gaps.
  - Reduces moral barriers.
  - Higher likelihood of using radical tactics as suicide.

Ideological approach

- Salafi Jihad $\rightarrow$ powerful explanation of suicide terrorism.
- Al-Qaeda: Global spread of Salafi Jihad and suicide terrorism.
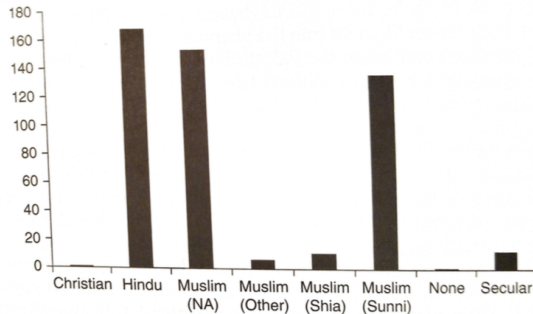

Figure 9.4   Religious Affiliation of Known Suicide Attackers, 1982–2015

Source: CPOST 2016

Ideological approach

- Explain suicide terrorism $\rightarrow$ Quasi-ideological approaches.

- Social/cultural factor of collectivism: recruitment and backlash against self-sacrifice.

- Direct test: attendance in religious services predicts support for suicide attacks??

- Attendance in place of worship increased support to suicide attack, also increase out-group hostility.

- Not the practice of prayer, but the social/cultural context that enhanced that tendency.

Ideological approach

Limitations

- Using suicide tactic for non-religious reasons.

- LTTE-Hindu; PKK-Islam.

- Adoption of suicide tactic $\rightarrow$ intragroup dynamics and need for survival.

- Groups provide social services and use religion as a test for the loyalty of supporters.

- Benefit $\rightarrow$ screen unfitting members (unwilling to sacrifice their life to ensure the group's survival).

Psychological Approach

WHY BECOME SUICIDE BOMBERS?

- Merari (2010): Avoidant dependent personality and suicidal tendencies.

- No evidence for any psychopathic or impulsive tendencies (clinical mental issues).

- Motivation: "quest for personal significance".
    - Personal: trauma, humiliation, PTSD ("black widows").
    - Ideology: liberation from occupation and nationalism.
    - Social pressures.

Psychological Approach

Limitations

- *Attribution error*: ignore the powerful effect of the situational context on the attitudes of perpetrators.
- Merari (2010): hopeless and harsh conditions under foreign occupation as motivation for Palestinian terrorists.

- Partial solution: integrate individual and societal level factors.
- Lack of social cohesion amplify individual psychological elements.

The Structural Approach

- Rational suicide attackers: the benefits of life after death and why it is better than current hardships.

- Structure $\rightarrow$ amplify rational decision process.
- Social struggles in a patriarchal system with certain gender expectations and rigid hierarchy.

- No direct and clear effects of factors as poverty or limited social mobility: the perpetrators of 9.11.

  ▸ SuicideJob   ▸ SuicideEducation

The Structural Approach

Preconditions of Terrorism

- High unemployment rates $\rightarrow$ severe economic and social conditions $\rightarrow$ higher motivation for suicide attacks.
- Regime type??
    - Democracies and foreign occupation $\rightarrow$ more suicide attacks.
    - Autocracies $\rightarrow$ easy recruitment in close societies increase usage of suicide attacks.

- Interaction of factors: regime openness and extent of religious groups predict suicide attacks.
- Most powerful: size, having a Muslim majority, and past experience with terrorism.

The Critical approach

- Suicide terrorism $\rightarrow$ social construct based on immoral and unjust policies.
- Desperation and humiliation under foreign occupation leading to suicide attacks.
- Military interventions (state aggression):
    1. More casualties than actual suicide terrorism.
    2. Motivate desperate actions to counter state violence.
- Focus on suicide $\rightarrow$ deviates attention from studying the root causes of conflict.
- Suicide Terrorists $\rightarrow$ multiple theories (Interview)

Policy Implications

- **Structural factors**: poverty and low education.
- Policy solution: raising literacy rates.
- May exacerbate problem with higher access to propaganda of terror groups.
- Regime: democracy promotion.
- Using force to promote democracy $\rightarrow$ more suicide attacks (military interventions).
- Foreign occupation, concessions and a demonstration effect: encourage others to use suicide to accomplish their goals.

Policy Implications

- Policy: harden and fortify targets.

- Suicide attacks → "resilient" tactic:

  1. Easy access and diverse targets that cannot be defended.
  2. Large supply of recruits.
  3. Not much preparation and early detection is almost impossible without inside intelligence.
  4. Easy access to materials (explosives, bomber vest).

- Alternative: prevent individuals from becoming suicide attackers in advance → counter-narrative (less prestigious).

Policy Implications

PREVENTION

- Understanding organizational practices and recruitment.
- Study motivation to join by talking with these individuals.
- Identify how foreign policies aggravate political grievances.

- Example: indiscriminate and repressive actions that enhance the popularity of terror groups.
- Israel:
    - Selective house demolitions $\rightarrow$ decrease suicide attacks.
    - Precautionary/preemptive indiscriminate house demolitions $\rightarrow$ increases in terrorism.
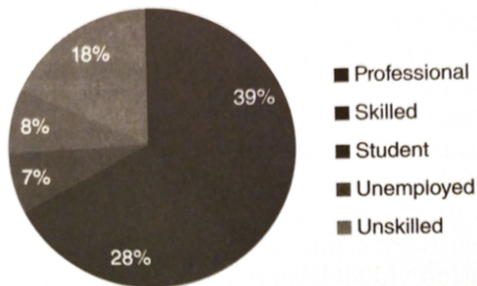
Recommended readings

More studies on suicide terrorism:

1. Michael Horowitz, "The Rise and spread of Suicide Terrorism," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2015), pp. 69-84.

2. Assaf Moghadam, "Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi Jihad, And the Spread of Suicide Attacks," *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2009), pp. 46-78.
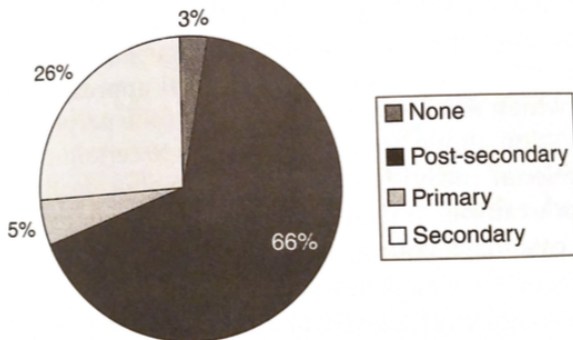
Suicide Terrorism

Figure 9.5 Occupations of Known Suicide Bombers, 1982–2015

Source: CPOST 2016

Suicide Terrorism

Figure 9.6 Education Levels of Known Suicide Bombers, 1982–2015
Source: CPOST 2016