

Study examines impact of education, income on support for suicide bombings

March 23 2010

Conventional wisdom holds that supporters of suicide bombers are people with low educational attainment and income, so investments in education and economic development should reduce support for such attacks. But a study by two Indiana University faculty members raises questions about that approach.

In an analysis of public opinion data from six predominantly Muslim countries that have experienced suicide bombings, M. Najeeb Shafiq and Abdulkader H. Sinno show that the relationship of [education](#) and [income](#) levels to support for suicide bombing is complicated at best. Support for bombings and the influence of education and income vary greatly from one country to another; and attitudes differ significantly by whether the attacks target civilians in one's own country or foreign militaries.

Shafiq is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in the School of Education. Sinno is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science in the College of Arts and Sciences. They say the study, published in the February 2010 issue of the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, points to the need for carefully developed policies to address terrorism and suicide attacks.

"Each country is different, and the attitudes are different depending on the targets," Shafiq said. "By just asking about suicide bombing, you're not likely to get a very useful sense of what people think."

The study, "Education, Income and Support for Suicide Bombings:

Evidence from Six Muslim Countries," relies on detailed data collected in 2005 for the Pew Global Attitudes Project. It examines attitudes in Indonesia, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan and Turkey, which have been hit by suicide bombings in recent years. Along with many other questions, the Pew survey asked if suicide bombings were often, sometimes, rarely or never justified, both when carried out "against civilian targets" and "against Americans and other Westerners in Iraq."

Generally speaking, the study found that people who were more highly educated were more strongly opposed to suicide bombings targeting civilians in their own countries. But support for suicide bombings against foreign targets tended to be consistent across education levels. The study also found that political dissatisfaction was a factor in respondents' attitudes, with those who felt that Islam was "under threat" more likely to support suicide bombing.

Shafiq and Sinno introduce a conceptual model to explain how education and income interact to affect support for suicide bombing. According to the model, education should reduce support for suicide bombing by instilling values and skills that provide for peaceful resolution of conflict. Higher income should discourage support for suicide bombing because wealthy people are likely to be satisfied with life and not believe that drastic measures are needed to effect change.

But education and income can also cause people to be more politically engaged and, in some cases, dissatisfied with government policies. The model shows that such political dissatisfaction moderates the extent to which education and income reduce support for suicide bombing.

The study provides some support for the findings of Princeton economist Alan Krueger, whose 2007 book *What Makes a Terrorist* argued that education and income were not related to support for terrorism. "At the same time," Shafiq and Sinno write, "this study

reveals that the effect of education and income on attitudes depends on the country and the target of suicide bombings. Therefore, this study draws attention to the difficulty of making generalizations about the relationship between [educational attainment](#), income, and support for suicide bombing across Muslim countries."

Shafiq and Sinno make two policy recommendations:

Continued expansion of education should be supported, along with the adoption of peace education that discourages support for suicide bombing. The purpose is to introduce students to tactics that involve less suffering and damage to society.

Governments of Muslim countries, the U.S. and other Western states should adopt policies that respect the dignity, welfare, interests and lives of Muslims, including support for trade, economic integration and cooperative security.

More information: The study can be seen online at jcr.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/54/1/146

Provided by Indiana University

Citation: Study examines impact of education, income on support for suicide bombings (2010, March 23) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-03-impact-income-suicide.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.