

Study: Conciliatory tactics more effective than punishment in reducing terrorism

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Policies that reward abstinence from terrorism are more successful in reducing such acts of violence than tactics that aim to punish terrorists, suggests a new study in the August issue of the *American Sociological Review*.

Titled, "Moving Beyond [Deterrence](#): The Effectiveness of Raising the Expected Utility of Abstaining from Terrorism in Israel," the study looked specifically at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and found that between 1987 and 2004, Israeli policies and actions that encouraged and rewarded refrain from terrorist acts were more successful in reducing terrorism than policies focused on punishment.

"Our argument begins to challenge the very common view that to combat terrorism, you have to meet violence with violence," said Erica Chenoweth, study co-author and Assistant Professor at the Josef Korbel School of International studies at the University of Denver.

The study is the first to empirically evaluate the potential of conciliatory tactics in reducing terrorism. It relies on data from the Center for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism's (START) [Global Terrorism Database](#) (GTD) and from the Government Actions in a Terrorist Environment-Israel (GATE-Israel) dataset. The GTD records global terrorist attacks, including Palestinian terrorist acts, while the GATE-Israel dataset, which the study authors developed, identifies counterterrorism strategies that Israel used against Palestinian targets and places them on a seven point scale from violent acts resulting in death to

conciliatory acts involving peaceful gestures.

Examples of Israel's conciliatory tactics that rewarded refrain from terrorist acts included: providing social services to potential terrorist constituencies, encouraging peace talks, withdrawing troops, releasing prisoners, and promoting cultural freedoms.

Israel's repressive and punishment centered attempts to reduce terrorism included: passage of anti-terrorism laws, extension of prison sentences, assassination, deportation, and military retaliation.

The study found these repressive and punishment based methods to be less effective in reducing terrorism. Yet, in an average month between 1987 and 2004, Israel took approximately 18 repressive or punishment based actions against Palestinian targets and less than eight conciliatory actions.

Chenoweth and her co-author Laura Dugan, an Associate Professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Maryland, said they hope their findings encourage policymakers to give more consideration to conciliatory actions.

"The general consensus across the political spectrum is that when there is terrorism you have to fight back," Dugan said. "This study suggests that there is value in looking at the grievances, the people most affected by these grievances, and the constituencies of these terrorist organizations."

According to the study's authors, when policymakers focused on improving the living conditions for Palestinian constituents, those same constituents were encouraged not to participate in terrorist organizations and, consequently, terrorism rates fell.

"If the constituency of a terrorist organization no longer supports that

organization, then the organization can't thrive," Dugan said.

In addition, Dugan and Chenoweth argue that terrorists do not commit terrorist acts for the same reasons that common criminals commit crimes. Therefore, they believe counterterrorism tactics should not mirror typical crime fighting approaches.

"Strategies that successfully deter common criminals may be ineffective for terrorists," Chenoweth said. "This is because terrorists are generally less concerned about being punished and more concerned about their role in ensuring the well-being of their movement and its constituency."

While Dugan and Chenoweth found conciliatory policies to be more successful than repressive and punishment centered actions in reducing incidents of [terrorism](#), the study authors are not completely opposed to the use of repressive and punishment based strategies.

"We do not recommend that governments adopt purely conciliatory policies," Dugan said. "Our hope is that this research provides alternatives to solely focusing policy efforts on reducing the expected utility of bad behavior by also considering the value of raising the expected utility of good behavior."

Provided by American Sociological Association

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