



An Empirical Study of Suicide Terrorism: A Global Analysis

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Summary

The authors provide the first global analysis of the impact (i.e., number of deaths/injuries) and quantity (i.e., the number of incidents/year) of suicide attacks, based on both country-specific and attack-specific variables. Looking at both international and domestic suicide attacks gives the researchers the ability to understand the unique properties of suicide terrorism. The three main goals of this research are to: 1) gain a better understanding of how suicide attacks look across the globe, 2) identify why some countries will experience no suicide attacks in a year, and 3) draw comparisons between international and domestic attacks in terms of target selection.

Methods

The data includes 2,448 suicide attacks (both international and domestic) from the years 1998 to 2010. The authors relied on event data of suicide attacks from the International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events (ITERATE), RAND, and the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), combining the suicide attacks into a new data set and eliminating duplicates and outliers. The authors used several econometric techniques to test their hypotheses (e.g., linear regression panel estimation for the quality of suicide terrorism, negative binomial panel estimation for attack-specific variables, and zero-inflated negative binomial panel estimation for the country-specific variables).

Results

The results are consistent with prior literature—over the years, target hardening has made suicide attacks more favorable to terrorists. Along with this idea, the author suggests that perhaps The War on Terror might also be encouraging transnational (rather than domestic) suicide terrorism due to prolonged grievances and potential targets becoming hardened. At the domestic level, suicide attacks were relatively similar to conventional attacks because they favor the most vulnerable targets, unlike their transnational counterparts who seemed to be drawn to more hardened targets.

Implications

Rather than softening our potentially targeted areas, the authors recommend that we instead become more vigilant and bring more awareness to officials, military personnel, and certain businesspeople. In addition, the authors assert that the scarce resources for preventing suicide attacks should be allocated more to the major cities where we have the chance to reduce more overall casualties in the face of attacks.