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The Effect of Terminal Levels of Education, National Economic Prosperity and Rates of Islamic Terrorism in the Middle East

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INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Terrorism, as it is known in its modern interpretation, has been prevalent since the 1st century. The use of violence against non-militant targets and civilians to achieve a political goal has become a hot button issue. Warfare has transformed from one nation facing another to non-governmental actors attacking nations. This evolution was brought to the forefront with the September 11th attacks on the United States, which destroyed the twin towers in New York City. While this was the most public and successful terrorist attack in modern history, terrorism has roots, which stem back to political assassinations in the Roman Empire. However, today the Middle East is at the anterior of the dialogue due to high levels of violence in countries such as Yemen, Pakistan, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. It is important to note that the high levels of violence in these regions does not equate to an increased likelihood of domestic and international terrorism. Rather, this paper will conclude that in areas with low levels of economic prosperity, education, and literacy coupled with unstable governments and radical religion, there is a higher likelihood of terrorist organizations being active. Thus, the purpose of this research paper is to answer the following question: What causes the formation and success of terrorist organizations in the Middle East?

The objective of this research design is to explicate the variables that lead groups and individuals to radicalize and commit acts of terrorism. First, this paper will discuss the importance of international policy and theory in the late 20th century and the 21st century. Secondly, it will describe how other authors and researches have investigated this problem and the conclusions they made. Third, utilizing the pre-researched independent variables this paper will demonstrate the shortcomings and reliability of previous data and conclusions. Fourth, the paper will alter the operationalization of the dependent variable in order to address the shortcomings of previous findings. Lastly, conclusions will be drawn from previous research to demonstrate a correlation between the above variables.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF TERMS

For the purpose of this paper, certain terms are operationalized in order to remove ambiguity in their meanings. Terrorism, for the purposes of this paper, should be understood as acts of violence against civilian, military, governmental, and non-governmental organizations with the specific intent of achieving political, spiritual, or social goals. Terrorist organizations are defined as any group that has executed, or plans on executing attacks against the aforementioned. For the purpose of this research Middle Eastern countries that state-sponsor terrorism are as follows: Iraq.
Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Syria. OECD is defined as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Terminal Education is defined as the mean level of education that is reached per country (with available data). No education is defined as having attended no formal education. Incomplete primary education is not completing grades kindergarten through 6, while 'primary school' is having completed grades 6-12. Lower secondary is having completed an associate’s degree, while upper secondary is having completed a bachelor’s degree or equivalent, and post-secondary is having completed graduate level work.

**IMPORTANCE**

The issue of domestic and transnational terrorism has grown exponentially since its emergence in gothic times. Frequency of terrorist attacks, lethality, and success rates have risen drastically due in part to the increase of military strength of superpowers such as the United States, the U.K., and Russia. The military strength of these nations and others, force groups such as ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Qaeda to adopt practices, which deviate from the norm of nation versus nation warfare. The leaders of terrorist organizations understand that a frontal war would usher complete destruction of themselves and the goals that they attempt to pursue. For this reason, guerilla tactics and total war have become the primary vessels for violence. These tactics are not innovative and have been utilized by many groups dating back to the Greco-Roman era. The most infamous act of terrorism from that period is the utilization of the Trojan horse. With acts of violence targeted, not at nations, but rather against civilians and soft, non-military targets, the importance of understanding the motivating factors for engaging in terrorism is more vital than ever before. The reasons that fuel individuals to engage in these acts vary; however, understanding the rationale and motives will allow nations to better understand and combat transnational terrorism in the future.

**POLICY AND THEORY**

The goals of Middle Eastern based terrorist organizations are similar in nature but ambiguous in specificity. Shughart identifies that there is limited vision and goal beyond the destruction of all western civilization. Due to the limited scope of these organization’s motives, it is often unclear how best to quell the rising tide of terrorism. Without the ability to meet these organization’s wishes peacefully, it is evident that the predominant and most expedient option is to remove them violently. Like all warfare, it is essential to understand the motives of one’s enemy. For this reason, there is a necessity to understand why individuals engage in often self-harming and lethal tactics. Quintan Wiktorowicz and Karl Kaltenthaler, authors of "The Rationality of Radical Islam," contend that individuals who participate in terrorism frequently seek selective spiritual.

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incentives. These incentives are divided into two categories: those who use acts of terrorism as a vessel for spiritual salvation, and those who are seeking self-empowerment against perceived oppressors. The two groups are similar in nature due to participation in radical activities, but the motives that fuel them are drastically different.

The authors contend that those who participate in terrorist organizations have limited prior knowledge and formal education in the teachings of Islam. For this reason, they are often susceptible to skewed and incorrect interpretations of scriptures. This correlation between education and the likelihood of individuals to incorrectly interpret scripture, highlights the broader Muslim community’s rejection of skewed Islam practices. James A. Piazza suggests that there is a link between economic factors and the likelihood of individuals joining terrorist organizations. Piazza contends that coming from a lower economic background affords the individual a target for which to carry out violent acts. As is true with many forms of crime, Piazza argues that low economic standing provides a path for these individuals into the world of terrorism. This buttresses the arguments of Winktorowicz and Kaltenenthaler who also demonstrate a link between economic factors and terrorist involvement.


DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

Seung-Wang Choi of the University of Illinois, Chicago, demonstrates there are a number of variables that can lead to nations having higher levels of domestic and transnational terrorism. He accounts for several variables such as income inequality, democracy, state-failure, population, and a variable designating post-cold war conditions. Choi establishes weak social structures such as poor schooling, and weak political systems, as attributes to a strong possibility of a nations serving as a quasi-incubation area for terrorist groups. Choi further determines that for every one unit of national industrial growth (keeping all other above factors constant) the incident rate of terrorism is at a one percent decrease. This study would suggest that there is a direct linear relationship between growth of a nation’s industrial power and the likelihood of terroristic tendencies.
As indicated from the table above, the data collected ranges from January of 2000 to July of 2013, the group responsible, fatalities, injuries, the group responsible, and the description of the attack. In order to limit selection bias, Choi utilized the Global Terror index, which records terror attacks across the globe, non-discriminatant of the nations from which the attacks occurred. Utilizing Choi’s findings, and the chart below, we are able to cross reference the number and brutality of the attacks to the levels of education in these countries. For the purpose of this paper, non-Middle Eastern countries have been excluded from the data collection. The data for these graphs can be found in appendix A at the end of this paper.

The chart above depicts the projected mean level of education from across the globe by total population, as well as, historical data collected based off the statistical parameters listed above. The data was collected based off census data for all reporting countries, and is stratified based on seven education categories. The parameters for each grouping are based on the final level of education attained. From the year 2000 to 2015, which were the years that encompassed Choi’s research, there were 6.87 billion people surveyed. Of these roughly 7 billion individuals, surveyed globally, 791.48 million reported having no education, 317.15 reported having incomplete primary, 901.16 reported having primary, 1.13 billion reported lower secondary, 1.26 billion reported upper secondary, 615.18 million reported having post-secondary, and 1.84 billion being under 15 years of age. Similarly, the chart compares two regions of the world to the global average level of education. In 2010, 82% of the global population reported to having attended some form of formal education. As the graph depicts, in the same year, the Middle East and North Africa reported as only having 74% of their respective populations attending some form of schooling.

When compared to Choi’s findings it is evident that there is a relationship between nations that have low levels of formal schooling attendance and terrorist activities. As the above

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data depicts, the mean levels of education for the selected countries is far lower than that of the national average. While this is not conclusive of individuals joining terrorist organizations, there appears to be a correlation between the nations who suffer from terrorist attacks and their levels of education. This claim is supported through the empirical evidence stated on the same graph. The graph demonstrates that western off-shoot country’s education levels are at or near 100%. This is further supported by the levels of terrorist activities in these nations. Countries like the U.S. and Canada have dramatically higher levels of education, and drastically lower levels of domestic terrorism as compared to its eastern counterparts. It would appear that there is a causal relationship between level of education and terrorism if all factors were held constant.

While the data suggests that a relationship exists, there is room for skepticism due to the data collection methods. Census collection is a valuable tool for collecting basic information; however, where it falters lies with the inherent bias that comes with it. When collecting data on such a massive scale there is a high statistical probability for a type I error, or incorrect rejection of a true null hypothesis. This information is based on the population’s inherent notoriety for falsifying census interviews, questionnaires and other data collecting information. It is for this reason that a third variable is required to prove the strength of the underlying relationship.

The third variable to be tested is economic growth in the countries listed in Choi’s research. Below are the GDP growth rates for Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, Syria, and Iraq from 2007 to 2017.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>GDP Annual Growth Rate</th>
<th>Last</th>
<th>Previous</th>
<th>Highest</th>
<th>Lowest</th>
<th>Unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>26.10</td>
<td>-2.30</td>
<td>-2.20</td>
<td>7.70</td>
<td>-26.10</td>
<td>percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>31.77</td>
<td>42.35</td>
<td>43.20</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>USD Billion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP Constant Prices</td>
<td>25739913045.54</td>
<td>41457640874.43</td>
<td>4816127871.61</td>
<td>120914137.35</td>
<td>19111915</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross National Product</td>
<td>396046990.27</td>
<td>7586917055.14</td>
<td>7586917054.14</td>
<td>100091940.00</td>
<td>1251191</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>774.50</td>
<td>1163.80</td>
<td>1310.10</td>
<td>774.50</td>
<td>USD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita PPP</td>
<td>2049.51</td>
<td>3775.82</td>
<td>448.155</td>
<td>2846.31</td>
<td>USD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestinian GDP</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>10.22</td>
<td>-1.80</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>271.05</td>
<td>244.36</td>
<td>271.05</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>USD Billion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP Constant Prices</td>
<td>11777946.00</td>
<td>11393105.00</td>
<td>11777946.00</td>
<td>8241686.00</td>
<td>USD Billion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross National Product</td>
<td>124864132.50</td>
<td>119087292.00</td>
<td>124864132.50</td>
<td>37751155.80</td>
<td>USD Billion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross Fixed Capital Formation</td>
<td>16472686.00</td>
<td>1555585.00</td>
<td>16472686.00</td>
<td>1268315.00</td>
<td>USD Billion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>114.70</td>
<td>111.20</td>
<td>114.20</td>
<td>304.50</td>
<td>USD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the graphs above, each country respectively has had a negative growth rate or lower reported GDP. While there may be a multitude of macro economic variables to explain the reasons behind the slow growth or low GDP, the data suggests that countries that have poor economic conditions can be quasi-incubators for terrorist organizations. According to Choi, there is a direct relationship between economic growth and the rates of domestic and transnational terrorism. Due to this relationship, and the negative externalities that are associated with poor economic conditions, states like the ones stated above have become quasi-incubators for terrorist activities. According to Winktorowicz and Kalenthaler, it is factors such as these, which drive individuals to utilize

\[ \text{GDP} \]


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violent means to satisfy a spiritual and economic goal\textsuperscript{162}.

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

The issue of terrorism has plagued the global community since the beginning of civilization. With new advancements in lethal technology, and backed by a religion that terrorists believe provides spiritual immunity; it remains vital to understand the motives and methods by which terrorism is successful. This paper has demonstrated that there are three variables, which give terror organizations the ember to thrive: education, national economic development, and government stability. With the presence of these factors in the geo-political landscape, governments can better understand the motives by which individuals will commit terrorist acts. Terrorism has been met with a great deal of violence. If a relationship does exist between the aforementioned factors and rates of Islamic terrorism, then nations can utilize this information to develop peaceful approaches to economic aid. By aiding countries who are plagued with terrorism, it will open pathways for governments to increase social spending on education. Other readers analyzing the relationship of class discrimination can further improve upon this research design and the effects that is has on domestic terrorism. By adding more dependent economic variables to the discussion, the scope of the research design can be increased to include non-middle eastern countries who struggle with domestic and transnational terrorism.

\textbf{APPENDIX A}

\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|l|}
\hline
Entity & year & CC & Total\_Yrs\_School \\
\hline
Afghanistan & 1985 & AFG & 1.73 \\
Afghanistan & 1990 & AFG & 2.06 \\
Afghanistan & 1995 & AFG & 2.4 \\
Afghanistan & 2000 & AFG & 3.03 \\
Afghanistan & 2005 & AFG & 3.32 \\
Iraq & 1985 & IRQ & 3.98 \\
Iraq & 1990 & IRQ & 4.9 \\
Iraq & 1995 & IRQ & 5.44 \\
Iraq & 2000 & IRQ & 6.23 \\
Iraq & 2005 & IRQ & 6.6 \\
Iraq & 2010 & IRQ & 7.43 \\
Pakistan & 1985 & PAK & 2.5 \\
Pakistan & 1990 & PAK & 2.95 \\
Pakistan & 1995 & PAK & 3.44 \\
Pakistan & 2000 & PAK & 3.98 \\
Pakistan & 2005 & PAK & 4.99 \\
Pakistan & 2010 & PAK & 5.19 \\
Iraq & 1985 & IRQ & 3.98 \\
Iraq & 1990 & IRQ & 4.9 \\
Iraq & 1995 & IRQ & 5.44 \\
Iraq & 2000 & IRQ & 6.23 \\
Iraq & 2005 & IRQ & 6.6 \\
Iraq & 2010 & IRQ & 7.43 \\
Syria & 1985 & SYR & 4.26 \\
Syria & 1990 & SYR & 4.68 \\
Syria & 1995 & SYR & 4.77 \\
Syria & 2000 & SYR & 4.79 \\
Syria & 2005 & SYR & 6.12 \\
Syria & 2010 & SYR & 7.07 \\
Yemen & 1985 & YEM & 0.64 \\
Yemen & 1990 & YEM & 1.25 \\
Yemen & 1995 & YEM & 1.77 \\
Yemen & 2000 & YEM & 2.45 \\
Yemen & 2005 & YEM & 3.12 \\
Yemen & 2010 & YEM & 3.84 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}