

Effective VEO countering requires addressing underlying social and economic issues.

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General Description of the Literature:

A number of scholars, policymakers, and pundits have claimed that people who lack economic and political opportunities are more likely to turn to terrorism and, therefore, counterterrorists should focus on addressing the political, social, and economic shortcomings of the societies in which terrorist groups operate. Writers who make this claim include: Ross (1993), Steinberg (2002), Newman (2006), and many others. There have been a number of systematic quantitative and qualitative studies on the “root causes” of terrorism (e.g., Li 2005, Newman 2006, Berman et al. 2008, Chenoweth 2010, Krueger 2011), but they provide only mixed support for the above hypothesis; various aspects of economic development and political freedom have variously been shown to both increase and decrease VEO activity.

Detailed Analyses

139: *Effective VEO countering requires addressing underlying social and economic issues.*

Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: Scholars have conducted statistical analyses on the relationship between political freedom and terrorism, and the results suggest that certain aspects of free political systems increase terrorism while others reduce it. The scholars use the ITERATE database on terrorist attacks and terrorist group formation from 1975 to 1997 in 119 countries. Li and Schaub (2004) find that democratic countries are more likely to experience terrorism. Li (2005) finds that institutional constraints on the executive increase the risk of terrorism, whereas higher rates of voter participation in elections and proportional representation (PR) electoral systems reduce it. He concludes, therefore, that constraints on governments in democratic systems limit the government’s ability to put in place effective counterterrorism policies, but that participation in the political process can channel political grievances away from violence. Chenoweth (2010), in contrast, argues that political competition increases the risk of terrorism because political groups have an incentive to turn to violence in a crowded political arena to distinguish themselves from their political competitors. She finds that measures of political competition have a positive effect on terrorism and, contrary to Li (2005), that executive constrains and voter participation have no effect

Li (2005) and Chenoweth (2010) both find that freedom of the press has no effect on terrorism.

Scholars have also conducted analyses on the wealth and power of countries and the frequency with which they suffer terrorist attacks. Li and Schaub (2004), Li (2005), and Chenoweth (2010) all find that more capable governments (as measured by a combination of economic development, military spending, and population size) are more likely to experience terrorism and argue that this is because they are more attractive targets and because terrorists can draw on their resources in order to stage attacks.

There is some evidence to suggest that economic development, after taking into account government capability, reduces terrorism. Li and Schaub (2004) and Li (2005) find that, after controlling for government capability, higher levels of economic development and higher rates of economic growth, reduce terrorism. Newman (2006) finds that there is no correlation between the economic and

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political characteristics of a country and the VEO activity in that country with the possible exception that the deadliest terrorist organizations may be more likely to emerge in underdeveloped countries. In a case study of the Palestinian territories (Newman 2006) concludes that relative economic deprivation may contribute, along with other factors, to support for Palestinian terrorist organizations. Li (2005) does not find a statistically significant correlation between income inequality and VEO activity.

At the individual level, there is no support for the idea that impoverished people are more likely to embrace terrorism. Berman et al. (2011), using a statistical analysis of survey data on unemployment and various measures of VEO activity in the Philippines, Iraq, and Afghanistan, find that there is no relationship between unemployment and insurgent violence. Krueger (2007) finds that there is no empirical evidence to support the view that economic deprivation leads individuals to participate in terrorist groups. Krueger and Maleckova (2002) find: that there is no relationship between economic deprivation and hate crimes; that wealth and education have no effect on support for attacks against Israel among Palestinians; that being above a certain income and educational threshold increases the probability that someone participates in Lebanese Hezbollah; and that Jewish settlers that attacked Palestinians in the 1980s were overwhelmingly from high-paying occupations.

Empirical Support Score: 2

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: These studies were all performed on VEOs and are very applicable to government efforts to influence VEOs.

Applicability Score: Direct.

140: *State provision of social services where they have been lacking reduces recruitment.*

Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: There is a single study that systematically investigates this hypothesis using empirical evidence. Berman et al. (2008) perform a statistical analysis on the spending of Commander Emergency Response (CERP) funds in the Iraq War from 2003 to 2007 and find that increases in service provision reduced violence against Iraqi and Coalition forces. In particular, they find that every dollar spent on small-scale reconstruction projects reduced the number of violent insurgent incidents for every 100,000 people by 1.9.

Empirical Support Score: 7

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: This study was performed on VEOs and is very applicable to government efforts to influence VEOs.

Applicability Score: Direct: At least some of the empirical results directly concern the context of influencing VEOs.

141: *Greater economic stability reduces VEO activity.*

Summary of Relevant Empirical Evidence: Scholars have also conducted analysis on the wealth and power of countries and the frequency with which they suffer terrorist attacks. Li and Schaub (2004), Li (2005), and Chenoweth (2010) all find that more capable governments (as measured by a combination of economic development, military spending, and population size) are more likely to experience terrorism and argue that this is because they are more attractive targets and because terrorists can draw on their resources in order to stage attacks.

There is some evidence to suggest that economic development, after taking into account government capability, reduces terrorism. Li and Schaub (2004) and Li (2005) find that, after controlling for

government capability, higher levels of economic development and higher rates of economic growth, reduce terrorism. Newman (2006) finds that there is no correlation between the economic and political characteristics of a country and the VEO activity in that country with the possible exception that the deadliest terrorist organizations may be more likely to emerge in underdeveloped countries. In a case study of the Palestinian territories, Newman (2006) concludes that relative economic deprivation may contribute, along with other factors, to support for Palestinian terrorist organizations. Li (2005) did not find a statistically significant correlation between income inequality and VEO activity.

At the individual level, there is no support for the idea that impoverished people are more likely to embrace terrorism. Berman et al. (2011), using a statistical analysis of survey data on unemployment and various measures of VEO activity in the Philippines, Iraq, and Afghanistan, find that there is no relationship between unemployment and insurgent violence. Krueger (2007) finds that there is no empirical evidence to support the view that economic deprivation leads individuals to participate in terrorist groups. Krueger and Maleckova (2002) find: that there is no relationship between economic deprivation and hate crimes; that wealth and education have no effect on support for attacks against Israel among Palestinians; that being above a certain income and educational threshold increases the probability that someone participates in Lebanese Hezbollah; and that Jewish settlers that attacked Palestinians in the 1980s were overwhelmingly from high-paying occupations.

Empirical Support Score: 3

Applicability to Influencing VEOs: These studies were all performed on VEOs and are very applicable to government efforts to influence VEOs.

Applicability Score: Direct: At least some of the empirical results directly concern the context of influencing VEOs.

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