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## Daily Policy Digest

### Terrorism

September 14, 2006

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## **EVEN FOR SHOE BOMBERS, EDUCATION AND SUCCESS ARE LINKED**

Some economists argue that we need to think about what makes a successful terrorist and they warn against extrapolating from the terrorists we catch. It is a problem economists typically refer to as "selection bias," says Austan Goolsbee, a professor of economics at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business.

In their new study, "Attack Assignments in Terror Organizations and the Productivity of Suicide Bombers," two economists, Efraim Benmelech of Harvard University and Claude Berrebi of the RAND Corporation, set out to analyze the productivity of terrorists in the same way they might analyze the auto industry. But they defined the "success" of terrorists by their ability to kill.

They gathered data on Palestinian suicide bombers in Israel from 2000 to 2005 and found that for terrorists, just like for regular workers, experience and education improve productivity:

- Suicide bombers who are older -- in their late 20s and early 30s -- and better educated are less likely to be caught on their missions and are more likely to kill large numbers of people at bigger, more difficult targets than younger and more poorly educated bombers.
- Whereas typical bombers were younger than 21 and about 18 percent of them had at least some college education, the average age of the most successful bombers was almost 26 and 60 percent of them were college educated.
- Experience and education also affect the chances of being caught; every additional year of age reduces the chance by 12 percent and having more than a high school education cuts the chance by more than half.

"It's clear that there are some terrorist missions that require a certain level of skill to accomplish. The older terrorists with better educations seem to be less likely to fail them. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that terrorist organizers assign them to these more difficult missions," says Benmelech.

Source: Austan Goolsbee, "Even for Shoe Bombers, Education and Success Are Linked," New York Times, September 14, 2006; Efraim Benmelech and Claude Berrebi, "Attack Assignments in Terror Organizations and the Productivity of Suicide Bombers," RAND Corporation, September 2006.

For text (subscription required):

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/14/business/14scene.html>

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