

Fall 2016

Support for Suicide Terrorism in Egypt

Matthew J. Pastoria

The University of Akron, mjp137@zips.uakron.edu

Please take a moment to share how this work helps you [through this survey](#). Your feedback will be important as we plan further development of our repository.

Follow this and additional works at: http://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects



Part of the [International Relations Commons](#), and the [Other Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pastoria, Matthew J., "Support for Suicide Terrorism in Egypt" (2016). *Honors Research Projects*. 420.

http://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects/420

This Honors Research Project is brought to you for free and open access by The Dr. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams Honors College at IdeaExchange@UAKron, the institutional repository of The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio, USA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Research Projects by an authorized administrator of IdeaExchange@UAKron. For more information, please contact mjon@uakron.edu, uapress@uakron.edu.

Support for Suicide Bombing in Egypt

Matthew Pastoria

The University of Akron

16 December 2016

I. Introduction

25 church goers were murdered in a suicide bombing against a church in Cairo on the 11th of December, 2016. Egypt was the latest nation to bleed from a suicide bombing attack perpetrated by the Islamic State. In the past two years, France, Belgium, Kuwait, Iraq, and Turkey have all experienced a suicide attack for which ISIS has claimed responsibility. ISIS is only able to perform these attacks when they have the necessary support. Why are people in Egypt likely to support suicide bombing? This is pertinent to understand, especially in the wake of this most recent attack.

Suicide bombing has been front and center in the United States since 2001, when suicide terrorists crashed themselves into the Pentagon and the Twin Towers. Suicide bombing is a powerful psychological force, as it indicates to the perpetrator's enemies that they are not afraid to die for their cause. Therefore, the ideology for which these suicide bombers fight must be understood.

Salafi Jihadism is an ideology held by a very small portion of Muslims. This ideology is based in the interpretation of how Islam should be practiced. They believe in bringing about a Caliphate, a nation under which all people are united and practice Islam together. This Caliphate would be governed by the most stringent interpretation of the Quran, and those who refused to follow it would be killed. In doing so, the Salafis would bring about a second Golden Age of Islam, similar to the prosperous time for Islam under their first four Caliphs (leaders of the Caliphate).

Among beliefs held by Salafi Jihadists is a violent interpretation of the idea of Jihad, or struggle. Most Muslims believe that the struggle is to overcome their desires and instead align

themselves with the will of Allah. However, Salafis believe that in addition to this, there must be Jihad of the Sword, which is a term describing the killing of forces in the world which threaten the practice of Islam. Such forces vary on a spectrum from individuals who don't believe in the Salafi Jihadi interpretation of Islam all the way to the idea of modernity and the advance of modern technology.

A large reason that suicide bombing is so prevalent as a tactic among Salafi Jihadist groups is that their ideology teaches their followers that a death by suicide bombing is a death of martyrdom. This means the bomber will be rewarded generously by Allah for giving their life in the service of Him. To die as a martyr is a great honor among Salafi Jihadists.

Egypt herself was involved in the development of Salafi Jihadism as we know it today. An Egyptian by the name of Sayyid Qutb was a forerunner of Salafi Jihadist ideology. Qutb visited the United States in the 1940s and was disgusted by what he saw. He was appalled by the sexuality of women and the racism. This disgust fueled his desire to rid the world of the West. When he returned to Egypt, he eventually determined that Egypt was an apostate state and that it was corrupted by the West and by America. Qutb informed the doctrine of Jihad against apostate rulers, and the idea that all Muslim men have an obligation to engage in this Jihad or be killed.

II. Literature Review

A 2012 paper demonstrated that the characteristics of a suicide attack were determined by economic conditions. When there were poor economic times, suicide attackers were more educated, and they hit more important targets. This was because in poor economic times, those who were highly educated but couldn't find jobs became extremely frustrated. They became disgruntled with the economic system, because they had done everything properly to earn a job, but were

not working. The power of Salafi Jihadist ideology to take root in people to motivate them to commit an act of suicide terrorism may be linked to that individual's economic standing. This was mainly observed in the Israeli Palestinian conflict, as it is a large source for information on suicide bombing because it happened so frequently in that conflict (Benmelech, 2012).

The political climate also plays a large part in the frequency of and support for suicide terrorism. "For those who carry out acts of martyrdom the motives are many. Foremost among them are the overwhelming general state of national frustration, and the feeling that life and death are the same thing..." (Abdel-Khalek, 2004). This model indicates that a hopelessness in one's life, a major contributing factor being the hope for a future, contributes greatly to the decision to engage in suicide bombing. Salafi Jihadists prey upon those who feel hopeless, and offer them hope through their interpretation of Islam.

Abdel-Khalek also outlines a few other symptoms that contribute to a person's decision to engage in what he called "acts of martyrdom". The lack of alternative means to achieve their goals is one of them, as well as feeling oppressed, controlled, and subjugated. In the instance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Palestinians who engage in suicide bombings usually believe that their cause is morally just and they believe it is their duty to protect their land and that they will be rewarded for doing so. Additionally, a very important criteria that highlights the difference between Eastern and Western mindsets is that the knowledge that "protecting Islam's religious sacred places and properties...is a first duty" (Abdel-Khalek, 2004).

Politics alone plays very little into the literature, and in fact much of the literature suggests that an individual's decision to engage in suicide bombing has to do with one's religious beliefs primarily with the political climate being secondary. A hatred of the enemies of Islam as

well as, in the case of Palestine, having an ethno-nationalist struggle contribute to a person's willingness to partake in suicide bombings. These factors also need to develop alongside perceived repression, and an individual's belief that there is no hope for success further along in their lives before they turn to terrorism (Bruce, 2013). This suggests that repression plays a role in support for suicide bombing.

A study in Pakistan conducted in 2015 attempted to answer why some Muslims turn to suicide attacks by offering a few different explanations and testing them. The most powerful explanation was the misinterpretation of Islam. The Islamic radicals paint a more bloodthirsty picture of what the life of a Muslim should be, and they indoctrinate people into believing that is true Islam. This causes them to believe the idea that they will be rewarded for their sacrifice and influences support for suicide bombing as well (Urooj, 2015). This ideology is Salafi Jihadism, and once it takes hold in a person, they will support suicide bombing.

As well as a distorted picture of Islam, revenge, a collective Muslim Identity, ideology, and material rewards played a part in pushing support for suicide terrorism. The most powerful of these is revenge, against the bloodthirsty imperialist infidel West, which along with the previously named aggravating factors, really rubs some people in the Middle East the wrong way. Therefore, the perception of the West should contribute to the support of suicide bombing (Urooj, 2015).

Fair and Shepherd's 2006 paper on support for terrorism in 14 Muslim countries provides some valuable insight. The first of which is that people who believe that religious leaders should be more involved in politics are much more likely to support terrorism than those who don't. Individuals who believe that Islam is under threat were more likely to support terrorism as well.

Finally, individuals who owned phones and computers were more likely to support terrorism (Fair, 2006). This provides an interesting insight into how Salafi Jihadi ideology spreads, which is often times through the internet. Salafi Jihadists look for people who feel alone and isolated online and slowly welcome them into a community of jihadists which will provide them the love and support and acceptance they desire.

Shariq and Sinno studied support for suicide bombings in 2009. The support as it related to income and education varied country by country, but consistently educational attainment moderated political satisfaction in every country. This means the more educated a person became, the more dissatisfied with politics they became. Dissatisfaction with politics is a factor considered when studying support for suicide terrorism (Shariq, 2009). This helps explain why so many suicide bombers and members of these organizations are well educated.

III. Hypothesis

The dependent variable I am testing is Support for suicide bombing to defend Islam among Muslims in Egypt. I believe that a person's support for Suicide Bombing will be dependent upon their socioeconomic status, their practice of religion, their ideas about how their nation should be run, and their satisfaction with life and the economy.

A person's socioeconomic status should be considered when evaluating support for suicide bombing. The question was "How satisfied are you with your current standard of living?" A person who is unable to achieve a better life for themselves may find themselves frustrated with the system which is keeping them poor. Their frustration may be with the government, it may be with modernity, or it may be with many other things. However, being frustrated can lead some-

one to take extreme action. If this person is frustrated with the way Egypt is being run, they may be more likely to support action against it including suicide bombing.

An individual's satisfaction with their life should also contribute to how they view suicide bombing. The question was "How satisfied are you with your life?" If a person is thriving and is satisfied with their life, they will desire stability. In general, suicide bombing tends to be a revolutionary tactic, to uproot stability and replace political regimes. If these regimes are favoring an individual, that individual may not support overthrowing that regime, and would therefore not support suicide bombing.

Similar to satisfaction with life, a person's satisfaction with the economy should be a contributing factor toward support for suicide bombing. Respondents were asked, "How satisfied are you with the economy?" If the economy is working for someone, they should be less likely to support suicide bombing, as it is a destabilizing economic force. In Egypt, tourism is a powerful industry. Suicide bombing in Egypt can harm the tourism industry and therefore the economy as a whole. So if a person was satisfied, they wouldn't want that, but if a person is dissatisfied, they may be more likely to support such actions, so that the regime feels the economic desperation they do.

The practice of religion, measured by how frequently a Muslim respondent prays, should be a contributing factor as well. The exact question was "How often, if at all, do you pray: hardly ever, only during religious holidays, only on Fridays, only on Fridays and religious holidays, more than once a week, every day at least once, or every day five times?" If a Muslim is praying five times a day seven days a week as a "good Muslim" should, they are more likely to be well educated about Islam. And the more well educated someone is about Islam, the less likely they

should be to fall for the ideology of Salafi Jihadism, because they'd be able to detect incorrect reasoning or when statements don't align with the way they were taught to read the Quran. However, the frequency of prayer is a strong indicator of a strong religious identity, which could lead someone to a deep concern for Muslims who are being oppressed somewhere else, and could lead them to support suicide terrorism to protect other Muslims.

Finally, the desire of religion to influence the laws of Egypt should be a contributing factor as well. The question was "Which of the following three statements comes closer to your view – laws in our country should strictly follow the teachings of the Quran, laws in our country should follow the values and principles of Islam but not strictly follow the teachings of the Quran OR laws in our country should not be influenced by the teachings of the Quran?" If a person desires the nation to be rooted in Islam more than it is, they may support a more radical approach to overthrow the regime and institute a heavily theocratic government, like the one Salafi Jihadists wish to create.

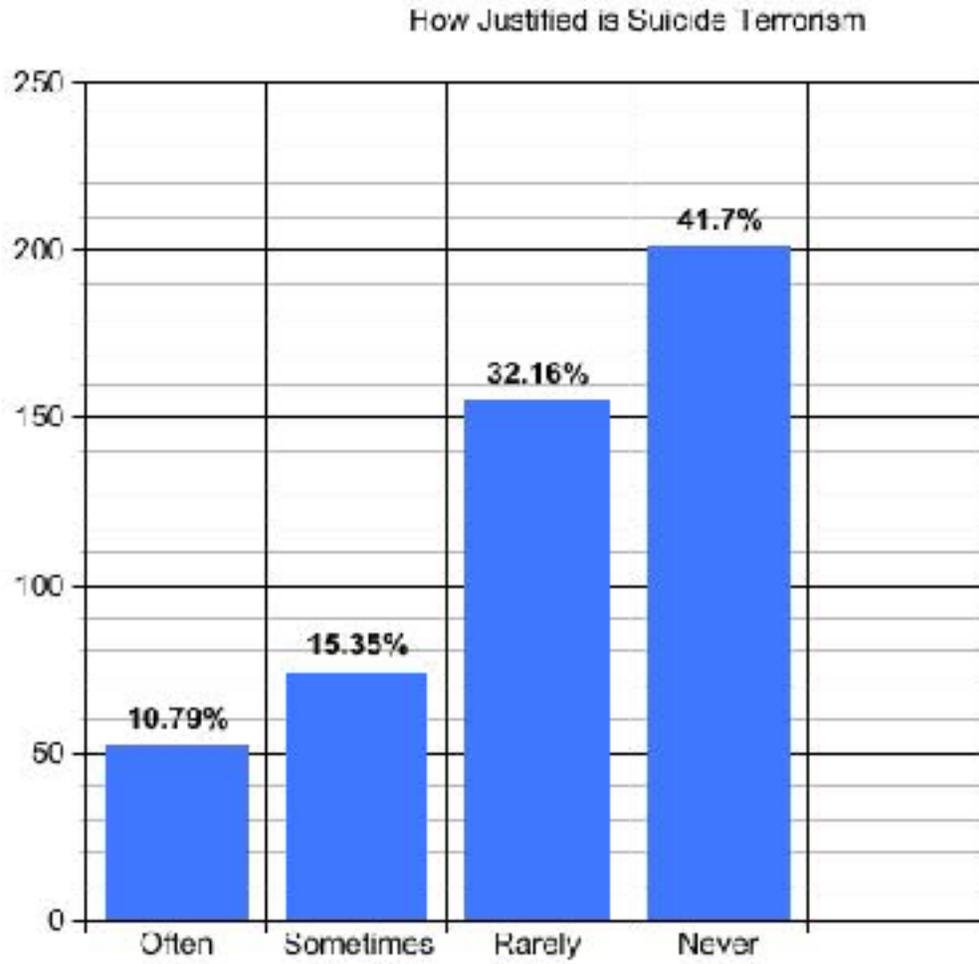
IV. Research Design

The PEW research center's Global Attitudes Project is the survey from which all of my data came. Question 100 of that survey was: "Some people think that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets are justified in order to defend Islam from its enemies. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence is never justified. Do you personally feel that this kind of violence is often justified to defend Islam, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?"

The results of this question were largely on the side of not justified among my sample of 482 respondents.

Table 1.

N = 482



The data provided by respondents was coded and that made it possible for me to use a quantitative approach. My hypotheses can be tested through and ordered probit regression, so as to display which independent variable has the most influence over the dependent variable. This is the most suitable approach to investigate the hypotheses because it will display statistical significance in correlation between the independent variables tested against the dependent variable.

Table 2. Results

State of Economy	.169	.011	.067
Personal Satisfaction	-.182	.150	.126
Laws of Country should match Quran	.389	.000	.077
Gender	.140	.175	.103
Age	-.001	.826	.004
Frequency of Prayer	.012	.666	.028
Income	-6.51e-06	.897	.000
N		492	
LR chi2 (7)		35.41	
Prob > chi2		.0292	

The regression showed that the respondents evaluation of how good the economy is a significant factor in one's support for suicide terrorism. This seems to contradict the conventional wisdom, that a poor economy pushes individuals to support terrorism, because the better the person's perception of the economy, the higher their support for suicide bombing to defend Islam. This is not necessarily contradictory with what we already know. The profile of the average terrorist usually includes the fact that they are well educated people. This is sometimes explained away by the idea of a poor economy, but it could also be explained by a well educated individual's passion for something greater than just a good paying job in a good economy.

The most significant factor in support for suicide terrorism is the individual's desire for the laws of Egypt to be modeled after the laws of the Quran. This is the Quran as a whole, and the laws here are not just the ones that Salafi Jihadists preach. While it is possible that this means it's the ideology of Salafi Jihadism that the government should be Islamic that pushes support for suicide bombing, further research into the nuances of this correlation is needed. The practice of religion, as measured by the frequency of prayer, was not a significant factor in determining support. The idea that the government should be Islamic was a more powerful indicator of support than the frequency with which a person prayed. This would tend to display that it is the ideology Salafi Jihadism, rather than the practice of Islam which influences this correlation, but further research into this matter is necessary.

V. Conclusion

The idea that the laws of Egypt should reflect the laws of the Quran was the most significant factor in determining a person's support for suicide bombing among Muslims in Egypt. This could mean many things, therefore further research is necessary. But it is possible that the ideol-

ogy of Salafi Jihadism is the key culprit here. Salafi Jihadism and more specifically the Egyptian and Ideological Father of Salafism Sayyid Qutb preaches that all Muslim men must engage in jihad against the West and all apostate governments.

This ideology is the one that attacked the United States on 9/11, and has spawned suicide bomber attacks all over the world. Most recently in a church in Cairo. Understanding the attitudes of support toward the practice of suicide bombing is crucial to understand how to fight this Global War on Terror.

References

- Abdel-Khalek, A. M. (2004). Neither Altruistic Suicide, nor Terrorism but Martyrdom: A Muslim Perspective. *Archives Of Suicide Research*, 8(1), 99-113.
- Benmelech, E., Berrebi, C., & Klor, E. F. (2012). Economic Conditions and the Quality of Suicide Terrorism. *Journal Of Politics*, 74(1), 113-128. doi:10.1017/S0022381611001101
- Bruce, G. (2013). Intrinsic and External Factors and Influences on the Motivation of Suicide Attackers. *Journal Of Military & Veterans' Health*, 21(3), 27-33.
- Fair, C. C., & Shepherd, B. (2006). Who Supports Terrorism? Evidence from Fourteen Muslim Countries. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 29(1), 51-74.
- Shafiq, M. N., & Sinno, A. H. (2009). Education, Income, and Support for Suicide Bombings: Evidence from Six Muslim Countries. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 54(1), 146-178. doi:10.1177/0022002709351411
- Urooj, A., & Tariq, S. (2015). Causes of Suicide Terrorism in Pakistan as Perceived by Media Personnel. *Journal Of Behavioural Sciences*, 25(1), 91-107.