

DOES THEOLOGY MATTER?

A THEORETICAL LOOK AT RELIGIOUS TERRORISTS AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS

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Framework for Research

- What do religious terrorists believe?
- What behavior is consistent with such beliefs?
- Do we observe such behavior?
- If not, why not?

- Individuals

- Agents are rational, given their beliefs and preferences
- Typically not driven by poverty, rage, revenge, or ethnic differences, illness
- Many view martyrdom as altruism
- Religious doctrine or fervor not obviously a key element, nor is afterlife reward

- Terrorist Groups

- Few solo attacks; group support is important
- Radical religious groups that require service and sacrifice particularly effective
- Suicide terrorism chosen for efficacy against hard targets

Key Questions

- Why does religion not seem a significant motivator for individuals?
- What is the effect of religion on radical religious terrorist groups?
- Does the model suggest that policies to counter terror by religious agents might be feasible?

1 Terrorism

- Berman (2009), Berman and Laitin (2006, 2008)
- Kreuger (2007): What Makes a Terrorist
- Iannaccone (2003): The Market for Martyrs

2 Economic models of suicide

- Hamermesh and Soss (1974): An Economic Model of Suicide

3 Impact of expected afterlife on current behavior

- Azzi and Ehrenberg (1975): Household Allocation of Time and Church Attendance
- Blomberg, DeLeire, Hess (2007): The (After) Life-Cycle Model of Religious Contributions
- Pyne (2008): An Economic Model of Religion and Death

Assumed Religious Beliefs and Preferences

- Belief in afterlife with heaven and hell
- Perceives natural benefits for religious capital accumulation
- Anticipates reward in afterlife for religious capital
- Altruistic and other natural benefits for suicidal terrorism
- Believes martyrdom ensures salvation and pays reward in afterlife

The Model of the Religious Terrorist

- Specified a dynamic model of a religious agent
 - Consumption and savings
 - Investment in religious capital for personal and community benefit
 - Availability of martyrdom with perceived altruistic benefits
 - Belief in afterlife with reward for capital and martyrdom

The Agent's Optimization Problem

$$W(c, s, K, t) = \theta c - \frac{\Theta}{2} c^2 + \gamma s - \frac{1}{2} s^2 + \sigma K$$

$$V^B(s, K) = B + \omega s + \Sigma K$$

$$V^D(s, K) = -D$$

$$p^B(K_t) = \begin{cases} \pi & : K = 0 \\ 1 & : K = 1 \end{cases}$$

Budget Constraint : Expected Solvency

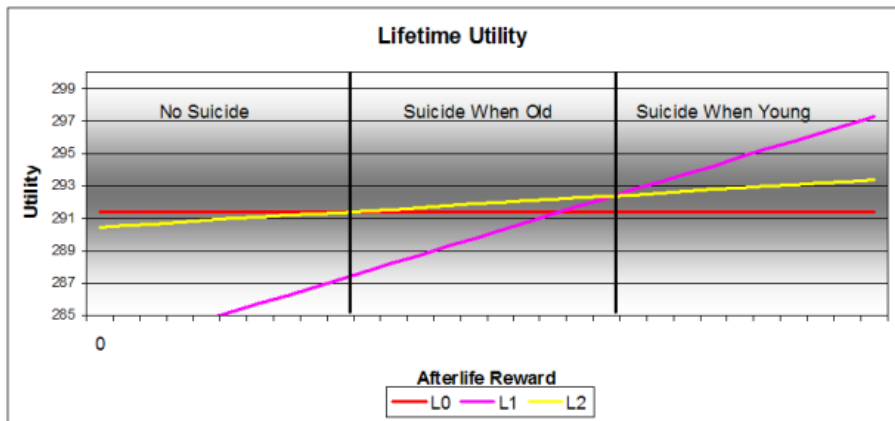
$$s_t = i_t + \delta s_{t-1}$$

The Multi-Agent Model: Terrorist Organizations

- Extend to multi-agent model of terrorist groups.
- Considered agents in club model (incomplete)
- Establish religious parallels to secular components of club model (Berman and Laitin)
- Characterize conditions for admittance to group
 - Group will exclude agents with weak religious beliefs and preferences
 - Religious capital might provide a visible and sufficient indicator for strong belief
 - Strong religious beliefs may enhance loyalty and preference for martyrdom
- Characterize the selection of martyrs
- Derive individual's equation for whether to be loyal to a religious group if defection destroys capital
- Consider the effect on loyalty of improved outside options

- Derive functions to provide behavioral rules for
 - Consumption
 - Savings
 - Investment in religious capital
- Decision rule for whether and when to die as a martyr
- Derive and analyze expected lifetime utility given optimal behavior
- Characterize group selection, loyalty, and selection of martyrs
- Establish points of indifference between martyrdom and survival
- Determine how these points change according to belief, conditions, and values

Model Solutions: Utility and Martyrdom



Why Is Afterlife Reward Not A Strong Motivator for Martyrdom?

- Decreasing MU limits appeal of additional treasure in afterlife
- Confidence in salvation lessens appeal of martyrdom
- Doubt lowers expected value of afterlife reward
- Immediate earthly concerns dominate religious concerns

Does Religion Matter for Radical Terror Groups?

- Religious sacrifice - capital accumulation - could signal strong belief
- Strong belief leads to loyalty if defection requires loss of religious capital
- These may reinforce findings for secular motivations

Feasible Policy Implications for Religious Terrorism

- Natural policies may be effective except for extreme beliefs
- Punishment suicide terrorism may counter perceptions of altruism
- Encourage investment in religious capital?
- Increase future income?

- Technical concerns
 - Quadratic utility is troublesome
 - Unlikely capital accumulation function (in levels)
 - Extreme simplifying assumptions
- Simplistic characterization of religious beliefs
- Need to examine empirical evidence

Conclusions

- Findings for religion may reinforce findings for secular motives
- Many initial results seem intuitive, but work remain incomplete
- Empirical work needed to establish relevance of findings and the roll of religious belief