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# GREG MANKIW'S BLOG

Random Observations for Students of Economics

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2006

## Human Capital, Terrorist Edition

Economists have long studied the benefits of education, but this study puts a new spin on the topic:

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 20's and early 30's — 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.

Professor Benmelech and Dr. Berrebi compare a Who's Who of the biggest suicide bombers to more typical 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. Having more than a high school education cuts the chance by more than half.

From [Austan Goolsbee](#) in today's NY Times.

### ABOUT ME



GREG MANKIW

I am a professor of economics at Harvard University, where I teach introductory economics (ec 10) among other courses. I use this blog to keep in touch with my current and former students. Teachers and students at other schools, as well as others interested in economic issues, are welcome to use this resource.

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