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Business & Media

Economics of the suicide bomber

by **Heather Stewart**
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Better-educated suicide bombers are given harder targets and succeed in killing more victims, according to research by American economists.

Efraim Benmelech and Claude Berrebi, of the National Bureau of Economic Research, studied almost 150 Palestinian suicide bombings, and found that older recruits, and those with more schooling, were assigned to tougher targets.

'The suicide bomber's age and education and the importance of the target are strongly correlated,' they say.

Previous research has suggested that suicide bombers may make a rational economic decision that fame, honour and support for their families outweigh any benefits they are likely to gain from a lifetime of ordinary paid employment.

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Benmelech and Berrebi suggest that, since more educated bombers could earn more in the labour market, they may demand higher-profile targets, with greater potential rewards. At the same time, terrorist organisations are likely to want to direct their most educated recruits to the hardest jobs.

Of 148 bombers examined, 18 per cent had stayed in education beyond high school, compared with 8 per cent in the Palestinian population as a whole.

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