

Economic Logic

There is Economics in everything

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2008

About Me

ECONOMIC LOGICIAN

I try my hand at blogging, discussing various events from an economic perspective, as the name of the blog indicates. I also want to put special emphasis on current research. That is about all I want to reveal about myself at this point. I plan on adding posts approximately every workday, with some exceptions, for example when I travel.

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Who becomes a suicide bomber?

Following the axioms of rationality and self-interest, it is difficult to fathom why someone would be driven to suicide bombing. This is especially difficult once you realize who suicide bombers are. According to [Alan Krueger and Jitka Maleckova](#), who studied the Hezbollah movement, they are relatively rich and educated, thus not the ones with no future we often hear about in the crime literature. [Claude Berrebi](#) shows that this applies as well for Hamas. Still, [Edward Sayre](#) demonstrates that labor market conditions matter. [Efraim Benmelech and Claude Berrebi](#) also argue that bombers with higher human capital have a higher success rate and are thus assigned bigger targets.

But how could suicide bombing be rational? [Jean-Paul Azam](#) argues that a little inter-generational altruism is sufficient. [Karen Pittel and Dirk Rübbleke](#) claim that terrorists provide an impure public good: a public good with a private good component (say, fame). [Bryan Caplan](#) thinks that terrorists must be somewhat selfless and somewhat irrational, especially suicide bombers, but they are still surprisingly close to *homo oeconomicus*.

What does this mean in terms of combatting terrorism? Explaining terrorists that they are mistaken may not help much, as does improving local conditions. Taunting them less would be more successful, especially as the Sayre study above shows also that the timing of suicide bombing by Palestinians is closely tied to Israeli moves.

Posted by Economic Logician at 1:08 AM 

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