

The New REPUBLIC

THE STASH

Does Terrorism Work?

Zubin Jelveh

June 3, 2009 | 3:34 pm

15 comments

| More



Print



With Osama bin Laden-and-gang's [return to the headlines](#) this week, it's worth asking the question.

Americans certainly know from 9/11 that terrorism can completely and utterly change the state of the world, but do attacks help terrorists achieve their goals?

According to [new work](#) from two Israel-based economists, the answer is yes -- and no.

Eric Gould and Esteban Klor of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem examined the effects of Palestinian terrorist acts between 1984 and 2006 on the attitudes of the Israeli electorate. They found that, after an attack, people who lived in the area were:

- More likely to favor granting territorial concessions to Palestinians
- More likely to favor the idea of a Palestinian state
- Less likely to identify themselves as "right-wing"
- More likely to have favorable opinions of Arabs

But there is a threshold level of deaths from an attack beyond which attitudes become more hard-line. (The average threshold number here was 78 deaths per attack.) The interesting thing is that the terrorist organizations on the Palestinian side seemed to have picked up on this:

...our findings indicate that Palestinian factions target the Israeli population in a strategically successful way by spreading the attacks across localities so that they rarely reach the critical threshold in any given locality.

Also of note, Gould and Klor found that terrorism is causing Israelis to vote for right-wing parties. This might seem paradoxical given what I wrote above, but the researchers found that, on the whole, right-wing parties have been moving leftward over time:

This change over time is evident from a casual inspection of the parties' official platforms. For example, the platform of the right-wing Likud party during the 1988 elections stated on its first page that: "The State of Israel has the right to sovereignty in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip," and that "there will be no territorial division, no Palestinian state, foreign sovereignty, or foreign self-determination (in the land of Israel)." This stands in stark contrast to the Likud's platform before the 2009 elections, which stated that: "The Likud is prepared to make (territorial) concessions in exchange for a true and reliable peace agreement." In fact, the Likud party in 2009 is arguably to the left of the left-wing Labor party's platform in 1988.

The unfortunate upshot is that terrorism does seem to be a [rational act](#).

--Zubin Jelveh

[POST A COMMENT](#)

We Recommend

[Sex for Beginners](#) (*The New Republic*)

[The Cycle Of Conservative Budget Delusion](#) (*The New Republic*)

[Obama's Speech](#) (*The New Republic*)

[The Free-Floater](#) (*The New Republic*)

[The Wikileaks Strike at the Heart of American Exceptionalism](#) (*The New Republic*)

From Around the Web

[How much Social Security can ex claim?](#) (*BankRate.com*)

[15 Reaons Why You Shouldn't File Your Taxes the Last Minute](#) (*Money.Ning*)

[Tamminen: Want To Solve Budget Woes? Close The Schools](#) (*CNBC*)

[Arabic Broadcaster Al-Jazeera Is Banned in Egypt](#) (*CNBC*)

[Fighting over Social Security](#) (*BankRate.com*)