

PLSC 500 Research Theory Paper

Education and Terrorism. A Causal Connection.

Bukhanevych Dmytro

SUNY Binghamton, Binghamton, New York

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Submitted 12/13/2017

Keywords:

Education

Terrorism

Middle East

Europe

Migration

Religion

ABSTRACT

There is a widespread notion in academia, media and public sphere, that beliefs do not actually matter. That underlying every drastic news story we hear is not what the actors actually say, sometimes *ad nauseam*, but something that is easier to explain and more salient to most people. Lack of education, poor economic conditions, lack of opportunities and other 'socio-economic' grievances are the actual sources of despair and, consequently, terrorism - is the common mantra. Various researchers and academics studied causal connections between terrorism and these 'socio-economic' factors. In this paper, I examined the possibility of a causal connection between education and support for terrorism. Does education impact one's tolerance towards terrorism and if so, to what an extent? My findings suggest, that the correlation between support of terrorism and a person's level of education is weak or non-existent and that there is a significant difference in tolerance towards terrorism depending on the governmental regime that the respondent is living in with people in full democracies being much less tolerant of terrorism, than those living in hybrid or authoritarian regimes.

1. Introduction

Terrorism is one of the most pressing topics of the last several decades. Its status has been, in my opinion, highly inflated by the general inability to speak about its sources honestly. It is a common practice to avoid bridging any connections between religious beliefs and actions. World leaders and politicians across the democratic world, like B. Obama *in 2016 and A. Merkel †in 2017 would deny any link between the doctrine of Islam and the cases of transnational terrorism of the recent 20 years. Beliefs, including religious beliefs, impact us in ways far more numerable than terrorism. It is only the most striking manifestation of the societal impact of unsubstantiated beliefs. Legislators across the world, including Europe and the US, evoke tradition, custom, religion to make political decisions from abortion laws and gay marriage legalization to military conflicts. This is why an honest academic and public discourse of issues concerning beliefs matters and is required to enable us progress into the future in a less violent, sustainable and predictable way.

1.1. Literature review

Most of the academic research doesn't take a holistic view of the phenomenon of terrorism and factors that create it. A bulk of contemporary

research is focused on one of the most invoked causes of terrorism – economic situation of the region or the individual and education.

General economic literature doesn't provide much evidence supporting the notion that lack of education or poor economic conditions necessarily lead to illegal behavior. However, various studies claim that education can be the defining factor to stop terrorism spread (Jean-Paul Azam and V. Thelen). Foreign aid focused on education can, as the claim goes, reduce level of terrorist threat in Western countries, particularly exposed to such a threat. Other researchers focus on the varying nature of terror, claiming, that types of terror attacks are aimed at different 'end consumer' and potential sympathizers, hence, they vary in nature, as well as in the type of people who support such acts (Krisztina Kis-Katos, Helge Liebert, Gunther G. Schulze. 2014. On the heterogeneity of terror.)

These findings were relatively mainstream to an extent, that there is a United Nations Secretary's-General Global Initiative‡ on education called GEFI – Global Education First Initiative aimed at violent extremism prevention through education. However, arguably, a higher number of recent studies suggest that this is not the case. A study§ of Somali youth over a 5-year period of a special educational program by a global humanitarian aid agency "Mercy Corps" have provided rather unsettling results. The program aimed at decreasing Somali youths' propensity towards political violence found, that the impact of the program in secondary formal education has decreased the likelihood of the youth in taking part in political violence by 16%, while increasing their support for political violence by 11%.

* <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/28/politics/obama-radical-islamic-terrorism-cnn-town-hall/index.html>

† <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/angela-merkel-islam-not-source-of-terrorism-muslim-states-fight-isis-a7588676.html>

‡ [http://www.unesco.org/new/en/gefi/stories-events/recent-stories/2016/can-](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/gefi/stories-events/recent-stories/2016/can-education-prevent-violent-extremism/)

[education-prevent-violent-extremism/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/gefi/stories-events/recent-stories/2016/can-education-prevent-violent-extremism/)

§

https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/CRITICAL_CHOICES_REPORT_FINAL_DIGITAL.pdf

Researchers like Alan B. Krueger, J. Maleckova, M. Feridun, S. Brock Blomberg, Ricardo Fernholz and John-Clark Levin and others find that ‘terrorism is mostly unrelated to economic conditions’ (S. Brock Blomberg, 2013). A study done by C. Berrebi and later cited in *The Economist*²² claims, that “[when] compared the characteristics of suicide-bombers recruited by Hamas and Islamic Jihad from the West Bank and Gaza with those of the general adult male Palestinian population. Nearly 60% of suicide-bombers had more than a high-school education, compared with less than 15% of the general population. They were less than half as likely to come from an impoverished family as an average adult man from the general population.” Another study done by M. Najeeb Shafiq, Abdulkader H. Sinno (Education, Income, and Support for Suicide Bombings: Evidence from Six Muslim Countries, 2009, SAGE) finds that ‘the effect of educational attainment and income on support for suicide bombings varies across countries and targets.’ The authors examined predominantly Muslim states that have experienced suicide bombings. They have also distinguished between the targets of the suicide bombing, being civilians in one case and Western military and political personnel in Iraq.

1.2. Study Input

Unlike works done by previous authors, I want to focus exclusively on the impact of education on support for terrorism. The scope of the study includes European countries, African, Asian and countries from the Middle East. All the countries have a significant number of the Muslim population relative to the other countries of their respective continents. While the work of N. Shafiq, A. H. Sinno examine similar factors in relation to terrorism, they focus exclusively on 6 Muslim countries they have chosen. To put in perspective the matter in question - a comparative study of various regimes, countries and cultures is needed. It enables to estimate the change a new environment provides to the set of beliefs and attitudes Muslims hold. Whether it is education, proximity to other cultures and nationalities, economic welfare, combination of all or some factors is to be established. This study is focused on isolating education and examining its prowess in shifting attitudes in regards to terrorism.

2. Theory

In this paper, I want to examine the difference in support of terrorism of Muslim population across fully democratic, flawed democratic, hybrid and authoritarian regimes as the function of their education.

It is a common notion, often not substantiated by empiric evidence, that terrorist organizations prey on uneducated marginalized individuals to utilize whatever grievances they have and channel them into political violence to advance group’s agenda. While this might be the case for a certain percentage of the supporters or actual perpetrators of terrorist acts, a very strong case can be made against such a notion. It is undeniable, that core of the terrorist activity is based on highly-educated or intelligent individuals who often have had strong financial independence or career perspectives. Starting from leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, often regarded as one of the first Islamist organizations, and its leader Sayyid Qutb, who went on to study in the U.S., and up to the current leader of ISIS, who (based on various report) had gained a doctorate degree from an Iraqi

University. Same goes to the 19 hijackers of the 9/11 terrorist attack, who were highly educated, some – in the West.

It is also widely acknowledged, that all radical organizations rely heavily on more educated individuals. Leaders of these organizations would want to rely on more committed members, which is what only highly ideological and motivated individuals can offer. An individual would be more committed to the cause and dedicated to achieving goals when their motivation goes beyond financial or some short-term gains. This is why radical organization are focused on recruiting more educated members, not only because of the intelligence capacity they bring to the table, but also because of their commitment level.

While this logic may apply to actual members of a terrorist organization or people who carry out these acts, it is debatable, if the same logic applies to support of such acts. It is another widely-adopted claim, that acts of violence to gain political or ideological goal that are carried out by terrorist organization have little support of the general population. This is one of the ‘lines of defence’ of people unwilling to label Islamist organizations as anything except for marginal, opportunistic and unrelated to the doctrine of Islam. While this particular topic is a subject of another study, it is important to see if the correlation of education and willingness to carry out terrorist acts is the same in support of terrorist acts and sympathy towards them. Not only would that allow to identify the ‘cure’ of the problem that would enable to isolate terrorists and their ideology from general public, it would also diminish the influence terrorist acts have and truly marginalize them.

In this study, ‘Support of terrorism’ has been measured as a percentage of the Muslim population in a given country that agreed with the following statement in a PEW Global Trends and Attitudes poll from 2006, 2011: *“Some people think that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets are justified in order to defend Islam from its enemies. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence is never justified. Do you personally feel that this kind of violence is never justified?”*.

Level of education variable has been categorized in 3 options – ‘No formal education’, ‘Some form of school education’, ‘Some form of university education’ for simplicity reasons. Education as a category is distinct and varies from country to country due to differences in educational systems. For simplicity reasons, I have collapsed all the different categories of education a given country provides into the three abovementioned.

2.1. Hypothesis 1

In a comparison of individuals who identify as Muslims - the more educated ones will be less likely to support terrorism than the less educated ones.

This hypothesis suggests, that the more educated Muslims, regardless of their country of residence and based solely on the level of attained formal education or lack of one, will showcase lower tolerance towards targeting of civilians in suicide bombing attacks, than ones, who have lower education or none at all. As straightforward as this hypothesis is, there are several stumbling points to evaluate the relationship that might exist here. First and foremost – it’s the difference of education systems, methodology, impact of theology and ideology on the process of education, particularly in societies that are not secular. There are also, obviously, different sects of Islam which have different propensity towards violence and suicide

²² <http://www.economist.com/node/17730424>

bombing, in particular. Shia and Sunni Muslims have often completely opposite views on this question, however, in the data there is no division between the different fractions of Islam.

2.2. Hypothesis 2

In a comparison of individuals who identify as Muslims, ones who live in full democratic or flawed democratic states will be less likely to support terrorism than ones, who live in hybrid or authoritarian regimes.

This hypothesis suggests, that Muslim residents of countries that are regarded as democratic, in general, would be less tolerant of targeting civilians than those Muslims, living in non-democratic states. This hypothesis nullifies the impact of education and is focused on examining the difference in attitude towards suicide bombing of the Muslim population in general, regardless of the education.

2.3. Background

The intuition behind the belief that with the increase of education a decrease of tolerance towards suicide bombing and targeting of civilians will follow is based on a data and findings from UNESCO. Their data suggests, that “secondary education plays a particularly powerful role in increasing people’s tolerance towards those from other social groups.”^{††} Data was obtained from respondents in Latin America and Arab countries answering the following question “Who would you prefer not to live next door to?”

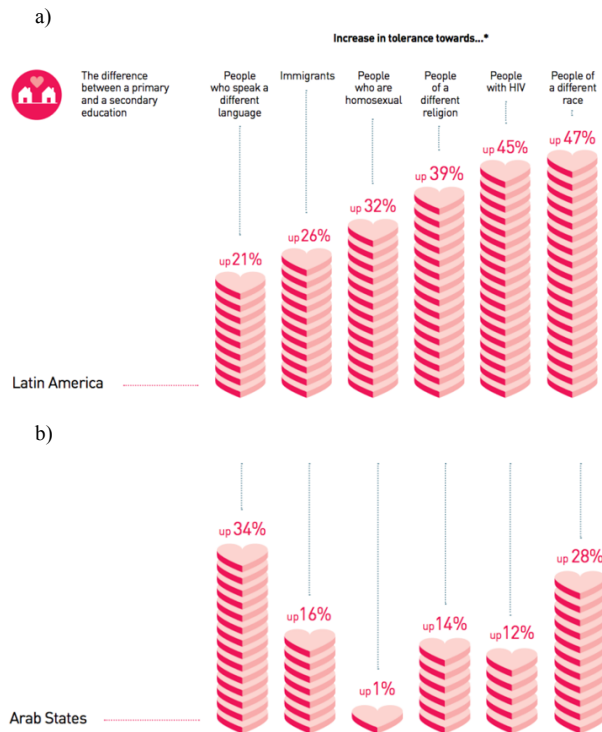


Fig. 1 - (a) Data from Latin America; (b) Data from Arab States

While the data from UNESCO does not exactly depict what is the question of this study, I believe they are directly linked. It is only natural, that with the increase of sympathy towards other groups of people, be it in terms of ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation, a similar increase in desire to uphold their human rights (even on an intuitional level, not necessarily, as this might not be articulated in such fashion) will follow. Hence, we can assume and examine, if the increase of individual’s education impacts their tolerance in extreme cases, as a suicide bombing and targeting of civilians is.

3. Research Design

3.1. Data

For this research, I have used three main sources of data.

- First is the PEW Global Trends and Attitudes poll from 2006, which is the one encompassing opinions of Muslims who live in Europe.
- Second one is the PEW Global Trends and Attitudes poll from 2011, which is the latest accessible poll which I used to extract opinions of the Muslim population from Africa, Middle East and Asia.
- Third source is The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index, which I have used to render the countries in the scope of the study by their regime types: Full democracies, Flawed democracies, Hybrid regimes, Authoritarian regimes.

Selection of the states in the study is not random, I’ve selected countries across several continents to showcase all 4 regimes types. Additionally, the proportion of Muslim population in non-Muslim majority countries should have been significant enough to have statistical value. I’ve used data obtained from the following countries: France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Palestine, Afghanistan and Niger. All respondents in the dataset identified as Muslims. The total number of respondents is 6158. The lowest number of observations being of over 400 in Germany to around 1.880 in Indonesia. All respondents who did refused to answer the question of support of suicide bombings and those, who gave the answer ‘Don’t know’ were excluded from the dataset. All respondents, who did not specify their education or have obtained some other form of education, that did not fall into typical categories were also excluded. This potential enabled avoiding selection of respondents who have obtained religious education, for example madrassas, which would have probably negatively skewed the findings of the study. The table below shows the number of Muslim population of the countries in the study, as well as the percentage that they constitute of the general population.

Table 1 – Muslim population of countries in the scope of the study

Country	Total number	% of the general population
France	5,020,000	7,5
Germany	3,551,802-4,700,000	4.4-5.8
The United Kingdom	3,106,368	4,8

^{††} <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002231/223115E.pdf>

Indonesia	225,000,000	87,2
Palestine	4,298,000	97,5
Afghanistan	29,047,100	99,8
Niger	19,502,214	98,3

Data from Pew Research Center report of *The Future of the Global Muslim Population, as of 27 January 2011*

It is important to mention, that data for the Muslim population in Europe dates to 2011, four years prior to the massive immigrant influx from North African and Middle-Eastern countries to Europe, which I elaborate on in more details in the conclusion section. This can mean, that the results of the study and conclusions must take this into consideration and make projections keeping in mind that increase of the Muslim population in Europe.

3.2. Variables

List of variables and their values are placed in the table below.

Table 2 - Variables

Variable type	Name	Value
Dependent	Level of education	1) No formal education
		2) Some form of school education
		3) Some form of university education
Independent	Support of terrorism	Binary (Yes/No)
Confounding variable	Type of state regime	4 types – full democracy, flawed democracy, hybrid regime, authoritarian regime

4. Results

First, I have examined the possibility of correlation between the level of education and support of terrorism among Muslims. While this would not establish a causal relationship, it would be possible to make inferences from this finding. The results are suggesting, that correlation between these variables is weak or non-existent across all countries, varying from -0.09 in Palestine to 0.1 in France.

Table 3 – Correlation between education and support of terrorism

Country	Correlation coefficient	Number of observations
France	0.1062	396
Germany	0.0349	394
The United Kingdom	0.0106	349
Indonesia	0.0123	1,863
Palestine	- 0.0971	900

Afghanistan	-0.0101	1459
Niger	-0.0332	797

Second, I've used the cross-tabulation method to calculate the percentage of Muslims, out of the total Muslim population of the country, who agreed with the statement: *"Some people think that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets are justified in order to defend Islam from its enemies. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence is never justified. Do you personally feel that this kind of violence is never justified?"*

Graph 1 – Cross tabulation of education and support for terrorism

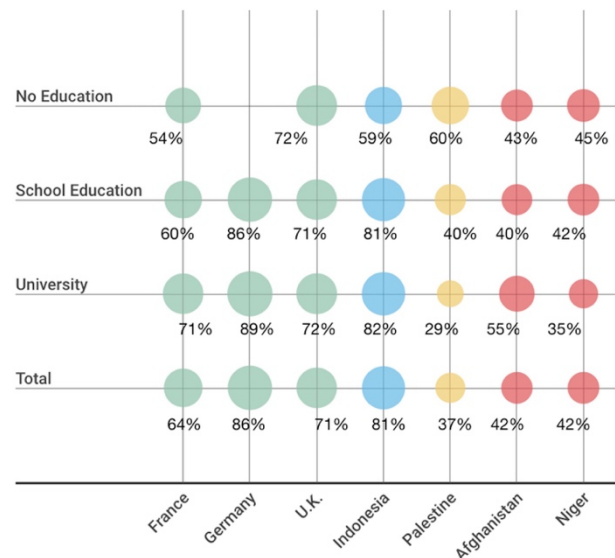


Table 4 – Legend for Graph 1



The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2016

With results of correlation tests and cross tabulations, we can conclude, that there is no relation between the level of education and one's support for terrorism. In countries like France, Germany and Indonesia we can see that tolerance for terrorism, indeed, drops as the individual progresses to a higher level of education. However, this effect is mostly seen due to simplification of the educational level categories. Inside the 'Some form of school education' and 'Some form of university education' categories are

multiple sub-categories, where variance in responses to the ‘support of suicide bombing’ question is high to an extent as to render the relationship spurious. Generally speaking, there is no linear positive relation between education and support of terrorism even in full democracies. Additionally, the data from the United Kingdom shows that the support of terrorism is virtually consistent across the three categories of education levels. Palestine showcases similar findings, as in the works of A. Krueger, Efraim Benmelech and Claude Berreb. Whereas these researchers focused on the actual act of suicide bombing and found, that in the case of Palestine, a suicide bomber is more likely to have higher education, than the median male in the region, the findings of this study suggest practically the same conclusion in regards to support of suicide bombing.

To test my second hypothesis “*In a comparison of individuals who identify as Muslims, ones who live in full democratic or flawed democratic states will be less likely to support terrorism than ones, who live in hybrid or authoritarian regimes.*” I’ve calculated the difference in means of the respondents, who agreed with the statement, that suicide bombing and killing of civilians is never justified of full democratic and flawed democratic states, compared to hybrid and authoritarian regimes. Regime type division was based on The Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index of 2016. The index is based on examining 5 main categories – “electoral process and pluralism, electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture. Based on their scores on a range of indicators within these categories, each country is then itself classified as one of four types of regime: “full democracy”; “flawed democracy”; “hybrid regime”; and “authoritarian regime”.^{††}

According to the ranking, France, the U.K. and Germany belong to the ‘full democracy’ category, Indonesia to the ‘flawed democracy’ category, Palestine to the ‘hybrid regime’ category, while Afghanistan and Niger – to the ‘authoritarian’ regime. For the sake of the simplicity – full democracies and flawed democracies are bundled together to highlight the contrast between states generally considered democratic and non-democratic ones.

To better illustrate the difference between the different state regimes of the countries in study, I’ve used a line chart which is placed below.

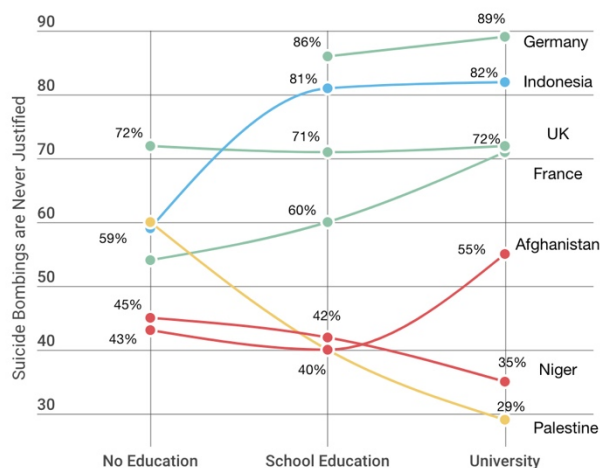


Figure 1 Illustration of means of support for terrorism across democratic and non-democratic regimes

^{††} <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>

^{§§} <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-press-releases/-/3-04032016->

Difference in means has been calculated in the following way:

$$\mu_i = (\mu_{Fr} + \mu_{Ger} + \mu_{Ind} + \mu_{UK}) - (\mu_A + \mu_{Ni} + \mu_{Pal})$$

$$\mu_i = 76 - 40 = 36 (\%)$$

The results suggest that, on average, a Muslim living in a full democracy or a flawed democracy will be 36% more likely to reject any form or justification of suicide bombing targeting civilians than one, living in a hybrid regime or an authoritarian state.

5. Conclusions

Results of this study support, to a large degree, the various previous studies of the same topic. Mainly, the results suggest that there is no significant correlation between education and the level of support for terrorism (particularly, targeting civilians in suicide bombing attacks) in any country mentioned in the study.

There is strong evidence supporting the notion, that Muslim individuals living in full democracies or flawed democracies will be less supportive of terrorism, than those living in hybrid regimes or authoritarian regimes.

Possible implications of this study can be that uneducated individuals do not simply fall prey to terrorism due to educational misfortune. Paired with the mentioned works, that suggest, that support of terrorism is mostly unrelated to the economic wellbeing of an individual, it is safe to assume, that the problem of terrorism is much more complex, that would be otherwise believed. Education can be viewed as a proxy of economic independence of well-being, as well as the general social structure and welfare. These findings show, that improving education or providing economic relief will not necessarily inoculate individuals from resorting to terrorism or the general public of supporting terrorism.

A comparison of education influence on support of terrorism which included more states than used in this study would undoubtedly add valuable information to our understanding of the matter.

It is also important to mention, that the data in this study will have more likely produced a very conservative estimate of the current situation in regards to support of religious violence. The data was collected before the massive migrant influx from African and Middle-Eastern countries, culminating in 2015, where over 1.3 million first-time asylum seeker application were registered ^{§§} by EU member states. The number was 1.2 million in 2016. The total number of refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants who did not file an application of asylum seeker is a subject of debate. The top 8 countries of origin of the asylum-seekers are (in descending order by the number of asylum-seekers) Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Nigeria, Iran, Eritrea and Albania. This can lead us to assume, that a very high number of the migrant are, at least nominally, Muslim and could hold beliefs that we see in the projections from countries like Afghanistan and Niger in the same proportion as residents of those countries. Including on the matters of suicide bombing and also other manifestations of religious violence.

The data has also been collected before the emergence of the Islamic State terrorist organization. It is important, as the IS became notorious in their aggressive recruitment and propaganda policy. With the pervasive nature of the Internet, ‘lone wolf’ type of terrorism, as well as self-ghettoization of some proportion of Muslim population abroad – it can be

assumed, that the radicalization had hit a new high in the period after the last PEW poll.

These factors, most likely, would have aggravated the situation which only reinforces the need to get to the bottom of the problem and address it.

Further academic research is required to spur an honest, data-driven public inquiry in the matter of terrorism, religious fanaticism and indoctrination and belief-based legislature across the globe.

It is important to note, that Islam is not unique in its detrimental effect on legislature, and politics, in general. Other religions and traditions are prone to produce the same effect. Russian Orthodox church, for example, has been widely regarded to be an arm of the state, often, its militant arm. Reports dating immediately after the disintegration of the Soviet Union (1990-1992) provide evidence^{***}, that Russian Orthodox Church has been infiltrated with KGB agents at least since 1967 to promote political and party agenda under the facade of the Orthodox Church. The practice was used to promote ethnic division, stir military conflicts and continues to these days.

REFERENCES

1. Alan B. Krueger – What Makes a Terrorist: Economics and the Roots of Terrorism, Princeton University Press; 2008
2. Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection? Journal of Economic Perspectives, 2003
3. Mete Feridun. 2014. Impact of Education and Poverty on Terrorism in Turkey: An Empirical Investigation. Applied Research in Quality of Life
4. Krisztina Kis-Katos, Helge Liebert, Günther G. Schulze. 2014. On the heterogeneity of terror. European Economic Review 68, 116-136.
5. Hamdi Muluk, Nathanael G. Sumaktoyo, Dhyah Madya Ruth. 2013. Jihad as justification: National survey evidence of belief in violent jihad as a mediating factor for sacred violence among Muslims in Indonesia. Asian Journal of Social Psychology 16:2, 101-111
6. David T. Buckley. 2013. Citizenship, Multiculturalism and Cross-National Muslim Minority Public Opinion. West European Politics 36:1, 150-175.
7. Education, Income, and Support for Suicide Bombings: Evidence from Six Muslim Countries M. Najeeb Shafiq, Abdulkader H. Sinno, 2009
8. Matthew A. Gentzkow, Jesse M. Shapiro. 2004. Media, Education and Anti-Americanism in the Muslim World. Journal of Economic Perspectives 18 :3, 117-133.
9. Jean-Paul Azam, Véronique Thelen. 2008. The roles of foreign aid and education in the war on terror. Public Choice 135 :3-4, 375-397
10. John Ishiyama, Marijke Breuning. 2012. Educational Access and Peace Duration in Post-Conflict Countries. International Interactions 38 :1, 58-78.
11. S. Brock Blomberg, Ricardo Fernholz and John-Clark Levin, *Southern Economic Journal*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (April 2013), pp. 849-863
12. Efraim Benmelech and Claude Berreb, Economic Conditions and the Quality of Suicide Terrorism", by Efraim Benmelech, Claude Berrebi and Esteban F. Klor, NBER Working Paper No. 16320, August 2010 Human Capital" and the Productivity of Suicide Bombers" by i, Journal of Economic Perspectives, 2007.
13. PEW Research global; A 2012 survey of attitudes among Muslims in 39 countries, <http://www.pewforum.org/dataset/the-worlds-muslims/>
14. PEW Global Attitudes and Trends Spring 2006 Data, <http://www.pewglobal.org/dataset/spring-2006-survey-data/>
15. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>
16. Education Transforms lives, UNESCO, 2013 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002231/223115E.pdf>
17. Mercy Corps, Assessing the Effects of Education and Civic Engagement on Somali Youths' Propensity Towards Violence, 2016

^{***} http://krotov.info/acts/20/1960/1967_loubyanka.html