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Sunni Suicide Attacks and Sectarian Violence

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ABSTRACT

Although fundamentalist Sunni Muslims have committed more than 85% of all suicide attacks, empirical research has yet to examine how internal sectarian conflicts in the Islamic world have fueled the most dangerous form of political violence. We contend that fundamentalist Sunni Muslims employ suicide attacks as a political tool in sectarian violence and this targeting dynamic marks a central facet of the phenomenon today. We conduct a large-*n* analysis, evaluating an original dataset of 6,224 suicide attacks during the period of 1980 through 2016. A series of logistic regression analyses at the incidence level shows that, *ceteris paribus*, sectarian violence between Sunni Muslims and non-Sunni Muslims emerges as a substantive, significant, and positive predictor of suicide attacks. Indeed, the context of sectarian conflict predicts the use of suicide attacks to a much greater degree than the contexts of militant outbidding or foreign occupation. We also present five case examples, illustrating the use of suicide attacks in sectarian conflicts in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, and Pakistan. Our overall results indicate that only a reduction in sectarian violence, and especially conflicts involving fundamentalist Sunni Muslims, can prevent the continuing spread of the suicide-attack phenomenon.

KEY WORDS

Suicide attacks; sectarian violence; Sunni militants; jihad; internal conflict

On June 7, 2017, Sunni militants operating on behalf of *ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyyah* (the Islamic State or IS) carried out simultaneous small-arms and suicide attacks on Iran's parliament and the mausoleum of Ayatollah Khomeini in Tehran.¹ The series of attacks, which killed 18 people,² underscore the development of the suicide-attack phenomenon as a mainstay of sectarian violence. To date, empirical work has yet to examine *internal* sectarian conflicts in the Islamic world as a significant driver of the increase in suicide attacks over the last decade. Most extant research focuses on *external* factors such as foreign military interventions and occupation,³ emphasizing Huntingtonian "Clash-of-Civilizations"⁴ explanations.⁵ We offer a novel explanation of the suicide attack's permanence in contemporary warfare. On the grounds that they are responsible for more than 85% of all suicide attacks during the past four decades, we focus our theory on the behavior of fundamentalist Sunni Muslims. We assert that an examination of sectarian violence—Sunni Muslim attacks against those who belong to different sects of Islam—can provide a key to uncovering why the most lethal form of political violence remains on the rise.

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In this study, we contend that fundamentalist Sunni Muslims employ suicide attacks as a political tool in sectarian violence, making the targeting dynamic a core facet of the phenomenon today. As fundamentalist Sunni Muslims carry out the overwhelming majority of suicide attacks, we analyze the effect of sectarian violence from the perspective of fundamentalist Sunni Muslims who claim rightful leadership of Islam.⁶ Sunnis follow the “orthodox” variant of Islam, in which doctrine generally discounts the teachings and practices of minority Islamic sects.⁷ To achieve the goal of reestablishing *al-Khilafa* (the Caliphate) where Sunni religious beliefs dominate over other versions of Islam,⁸ militant Sunni Muslims often use suicide attacks (framed in terms of *‘amaliyya istishhadiyya* or “martyrdom operations”⁹) to kill, punish, and deter members of minority Muslim sects.¹⁰

This study proceeds with five sections. In the following section, we discuss the pertinent literature, showcase the trend of sectarian violence, and draw testable hypotheses. Second, we present our research design, detailing our model specifications, operationalization of theoretical concepts, and original dataset. We then estimate various logistic regression analyses at the event level. The large-*n* results provide evidence that militant Sunni Muslims are more likely to engage in suicide-attack tactics in sectarian conflict rather than non-sectarian conflicts. Indeed, the context of sectarian conflict predicts the use of suicide attacks to a much greater degree than the contexts of militant outbidding or foreign occupation. To complement the empirical analyses, we review five country case examples: Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, and Pakistan. We conclude by suggesting only a reduction in sectarian violence, and especially conflicts involving fundamentalist Sunni Muslims, can prevent the continuing spread of the suicide-attack phenomenon.

Explaining Sunni suicide attacks¹¹

Research demonstrates that militant organizations are unlikely to institutionalize suicide attacks within their internal functions and constituent relations without a collective supportive of an ideology that sanctions the concept of self-sacrificial martyrdom.¹² This suggests that lacking incentives from constituents or external supporters, militant organizations likely bypass incorporating suicide attacks into their political toolkit. Is it then simply that Islam spawns suicide attacks?¹³ Moghadam deems “the growing appeal of the Salafi-Jihad [ideology among Sunni Muslims]” as a key source for the rise of suicide attacks.¹⁴ But, an important question asks what specific mechanism makes *Salafi-jihadism*,¹⁵ and other “extremist” ideologies, prone to turning its subscribers into suicide bombers/“martyrs”?

Successful organizational (and individual) process goals, such as carrying out martyrdom operations, mask unrealistic collective outcome goals. By the nature of their design, the abstract outcome goals that some militant organizations pursue foster the adoption of martyrdom operations.¹⁶ Piazza finds that abstract goals (and thus abstract ideologies) are highly correlated with suicide attacks.¹⁷ Such “maximalist” abstract goals (e.g., reshape global politics, eradicate entire sets of “undesirable” peoples, or erect religious empires) are significantly harder to achieve than temporal aims (e.g., secession, the expansion of rights, government replacement, or economic reform).¹⁸ Militant organizations achieve their outcome goals in a minority of cases and nearly all that do succeed reach temporal aims such as founding a nation-state.¹⁹ Due to the low success rate associated with abstract objectives, militant organizations with a basis in political Islam gain greater access to

individuals that aspire to be “martyrs” and collectives that celebrate martyrdom operations.²⁰

In particular, ideologies derived from the tenets of Sunni Islam produce abstract and highly unachievable outcome goals. Many militant Sunni aims center on eradicating sectarian “apostate” rivals and/or “infidel” adversaries in order to erect a transnational empire. For centuries, Sunni Islam enjoyed a position of power with the Caliphate. Yet, following the Great War, the newly established Turkish state oversaw the dissolution of the Caliphate. Beginning with the founding of *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin* (the Muslim Brotherhood) in 1928, militant Sunni organizations have sought to reestablish the Caliphate. Jihadis, other militant Sunnis, and non-violent Islamists have envisioned and pursued a variety of pathways to achieving the outcome goal of a reinstated Caliphate.²¹ But, with various Western forces and durable secular-Arab dictatorships representing common adversaries, militant Sunni organizations have often shifted their ire to less capable enemies. As a result, Shi’a Muslims and other sectarian rivals viewed as apostates have taken the brunt of militant Sunni attacks.

Fundamentalist Sunni Islam generally relies heavily on a Manichaean worldview that divides the globe into areas of *dar al-harb* (dwelling of war) and *dar al-Islam* (dwelling of Islam).²² In terms of attack targeting, these concepts of jurisprudence provide guidance for *jihad* (holy struggle). *Dar al-harb* marks territory that has “yet” to fall to the sword of Islam. *Dar al-Islam* represents territory governed or once governed by Muslims. Popular Sunni interpretations contend that territory of *dar al-Islam* lost to non-Muslims necessarily and immediately enacts jihad.²³ Accordingly, states like Israel, Spain, India, and Russia—having once existed (at least in part) under Islamic rule—gain the ire of Sunni jihadis. Though, as noted above, given the difficulty in fighting “infidel” states, militant Sunni Muslims have often shifted focus in defining success, and ultimately in targeting as well.²⁴

Since the defeat of the Arab armies by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War, militant Sunni Muslims have journeyed on a path that has successively reframed “success,” replacing real-world gains with various forms of the Islamic martyr.²⁵ The progression has gone from the *feda’i* (self-sacrificer) and *mujahid* (holy struggler) to the *shahid* (incidental martyr) and culminating with the *istishhadi* (deliberate martyr).²⁶ Traditionally, martyrs in Sunni Islam die incidentally amid actions within a jihad campaign, whereas martyrs in Shi’a Islam—dating back to the origins of the sect—have actively pursued death.²⁷ A snapshot of the contrast rests in the typical Sunni mujahid fighting to the death on the battlefield, while the Nizari-Isma’ili *Hashishiyyin* (Assassins)²⁸ carrying out daggering-wielding suicide missions and Hussein ibn Ali going into the battle in 680 against insurmountable odds—facing the forces of the powerful Caliph Yazid—exemplify the Shi’a martyr.²⁹ The Shi’a martyrdom narrative derives from a rich history as a minority and relatively powerless minority sect, well-acquainted with oppression under Sunni dominance, and focused on sacrifice rather than victory.³⁰ Fittingly, the contemporary suicide bomber emerged in the 1980s among Shi’a identity groups.

Although Shi’a organizations like Hezb ad-Da’awa al-Islamiyya (HDI) and Hezbollah introduced the suicide-attack tactic in the contemporary era,³¹ the perpetual and meteoric rise of suicide attacks did not begin until after Palestinian organizations “legitimized suicide [attacks] as [Islamic] ‘martyrdom operations’ in the Sunni Muslim world.”³² Acosta elaborates:

The Palestinian cause has always functioned as a galvanizing Islamic issue, particularly for Sunni Arab countries. Consequently, the Palestinian use of suicide terrorism before and during the second intifada had a direct effect on the general population of the Sunni Arab world concerning how it viewed martyrdom operations. As support in Palestinian society increased, [suicide attacks] accordingly found wide support across the Sunni Arab world (as well as in the Islamic world in general)... . Palestinian terror organizations effectively used the media to spread acceptance of a modus operandi that previously only Shi'a groups had used in the Islamic world. The Sunni community's acceptance of the Palestinian twist of semantics that presents suicide [attacks] as "martyrdom operations" led to the use of similar attacks by other militant Sunni organizations... . The support for suicide terrorism from important Islamic authorities across the Sunni Arab world served to solidify the legitimacy of such acts in the eyes of millions of people. Notably, the fatwa issued in 2001 by influential Sunni cleric Sheikh Yousef al-Qaradawi backing the use of suicide [attacks] against civilians buttressed Palestinian employment of suicide [bombers] against Israeli civilians and closed somewhat the debate over their general validity within the greater Sunni world.³³

Sunni-Islamist organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Sunni *mujahedin* (holy strugglers) like those who fought the Soviets in Afghanistan, as well as Sunni jihadis like Al Qaeda in its first decade of operation, never adopted suicide attacks. Not until Palestinians legitimized that tactic within the Sunni world did Al Qaeda sanction the use of suicide bombers in its Africa attacks in 1998.³⁴ And, while Jews and Israelis marked the focus on Palestinian suicide attacks, Sunni militants that subsequently adopted the tactic kept with a tradition of sectarian targeting that began with the modus operandi's contemporary onset.

Indeed, the sectarian targeting practice is by no means recent. To a degree, Islamic organizations have always targeted fellow Muslims with suicide attacks. On October 8, 1980, 13-year-old Bassidj member Muhammad Hussein Fahmideh became the very first contemporary suicide bomber when he attacked an Iraqi tank on the battlefield of Khoramshahr, Iran.³⁵ Marking the second contemporary suicide attack, on December 15, 1981, the Shi'a HDI attacked the Iraqi embassy in Beirut, killing 61 people. Later, during the mid-1980s, Hezbollah and its affiliates occasionally launched suicide attacks against pro-government Lebanese Muslims.³⁶ In the 1990s, Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Groupe Islamique Armé used suicide attacks against fellow Egyptians and Algerians, respectively. During *al-Aqsa intifada* (2000–2005), Palestinian terrorist organizations dispatched suicide bombers on a number of occasions to destroy restaurants owned by Muslim citizens of Israel.³⁷ Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and its successor Ansar al-Shari'a, Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahedin in Somalia, and Jundallah in Iran have almost entirely directed suicide attacks against Muslim targets of varying sectarian dimensions. For nearly a decade, Sunni-jihadi and Houthi sectarian conflict in Yemen has involved the use of suicide attacks. Even AQAP's failed December 25, 2009 suicide attack on a Detroit-bound flight would have killed scores of Muslim-Americans returning home to Dearborn, Michigan. The attack would have symbolically struck on a prime Christian holiday, while physically striking at the center of America's Muslim "apostate" population.

Importantly, over the last 15 years, militant Sunni Muslims have increasingly shifted away from taking on Western "infidels," instead fixating attacks on "apostate" minority Muslim sects (see [Figure 1](#)). Why? Certainly, militant Sunni Muslims decry the ascending Shi'a power that adds another challenge to the creation of an ideal Sunni version of the

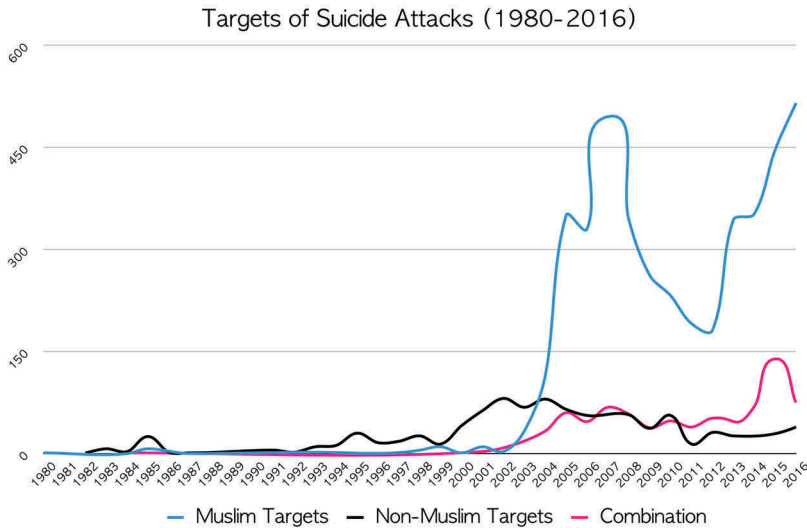


Figure 1. Targets of suicide attacks (1980–2016).

um'mah and this explains much of the targeting emphasis on sectarian rivals. Yet, the pursuit of grandiose outcome goals likely explains the reframing of Sunni collective success, in the same way that Shi'a-Islam emphasized tactical achievements over outcome-goal achievement for centuries until the late 1970s.

Targeting apostates over infidels

In the absence of clear collective outcome-goal success, Sunni constituents look to celebrate individual achievement.³⁸ At the individual level, a martyrdom operation represents an end-unto-itself and “succeeds” simply when conducted.³⁹ Consequently, martyrdom operations are very “successful” at a societal level as well. For many collectives and Sunni Islam specifically, martyrs are heroes⁴⁰ and heroes offer the collective a type of social good, which provides a symbol, event, and reason for celebrating social cohesion and keeping a collective cause alive.⁴¹ For example, al-Qaradawi, arguably the most influential living Sunni theologian, states: “to call these operations suicide attacks would be a mistake and misleading. These are examples of heroic sacrifice.”⁴² The hero epitomizes the collective’s ideal member, so when the self-sacrificial martyr/suicide bomber equates the hero, it creates a social need to reproduce such individuals.⁴³ In return, collectives continue to support organizations that launch martyrdom operations (despite their own lack of success in achieving political ends).⁴⁴ As Moghadam notes: “Salafi-Jihadists believe that suicide [attacks] against infidels and apostates—shorthand for non-Muslim infidels and nominally Muslim traitors—are the ultimate form of devotion to [Allah] and the best way to wage jihad.”⁴⁵

Outcome-goal success is placed on the backburner in favor of present-day individual success, which the collective celebrates together.⁴⁶ Individuals receive the rewards of martyrdom, collectives gain heroes, organizations endure, and together they fight the “long war” and sustain the cause. As abstract goals are difficult to achieve, the associated

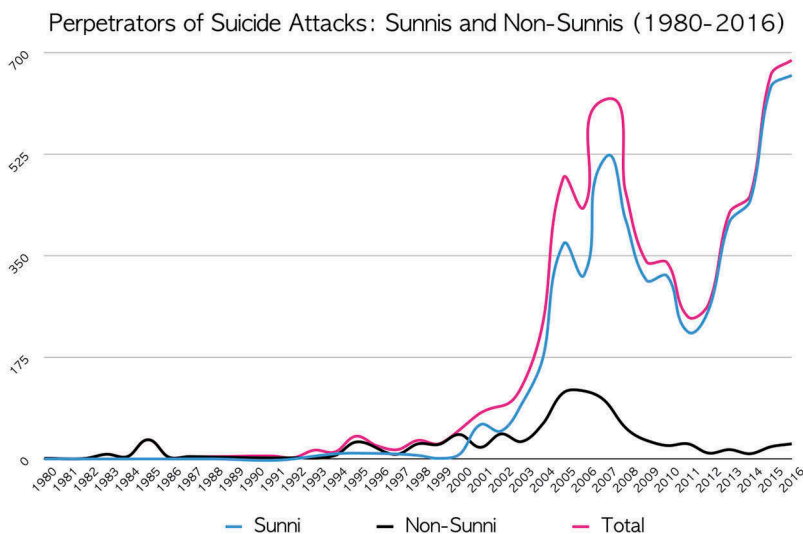


Figure 2. Perpetrators of suicide attacks: Sunnis and Non-Sunnis (1980–2016).

constituencies of militant Sunni organizations look to celebrate individual achievement and keep the cause alive amid collective and organized failure. Accordingly, sectarian rivals make for a prime target. The logic for Sunni militants suggests that if the collective cannot defeat powerful Western, Arab, and Muslim state adversaries, then killing off “apostates” whose mere existence represents an affront to Sunni orthodoxy offers an attractive targeting alternative. Figure 2 reveals the trend of suicide attacks committed by Sunni and non-Sunni Muslims in the period from 1980 to 2016, showing that Sunni suicide attacks continue to rise over the decades.

We expect that the sectarian violence emerging from religious differences represents a positive, substantive, and statistically significant predictor of suicide attacks. Sectarian conflicts involving fundamentalist Sunni Muslims offer a prime environment for employing suicide attacks. “Apostate” sectarian rivals present militant Sunnis with less capable targets than powerful “infidel” Western foes. From our theory, we formulate two central hypotheses:

H₁ (Sectarian Violence): Fundamentalist Sunni Muslims are more likely to engage in suicide attacks during sectarian violence rather than in other conflict situations.

H₂ (Muslim Target): When the target belongs to a minority Islamic sect, fundamentalist Sunni Muslims are more likely to carry out a suicide attack.

Research design

To test the hypotheses, we analyze the Suicide-Attack Network Dataset (SAND)—the most comprehensive dataset of suicide attacks—assessing the period from 1980 through 2016. We classify 6,224 unique suicide-attack incidents.⁴⁷ As our theoretical arguments revolve

around the motivating conditions under which militant Sunni Muslims decide to conduct suicide attacks, we structure the data at the event (attack) level rather than at the country or organizational levels.⁴⁸

The dependent variable, SUNNI SUICIDE ATTACKS, is dichotomous, coded as “1” when a Sunni Muslim carried out the attack and otherwise “0.” Our data indicate that among the 6,224 suicide attacks over the past four decades, Sunni Muslims committed at least 5,298 (or 85%) of all incidents.

Certainly, it is unlikely that all Sunni suicide attacks originate from sectarian violence. Sunni Muslims carry out attacks for a variety of reasons, ranging from personal vendetta (e.g., “Black Widows” of the Chechen Riyadh us-Saliheyh Martyrs’ Brigade) to a mixture of religious grievances and nationalist fervor (e.g., al-Jaish al-Islami fil-‘Iraq). Since our first hypothesis underlines sectarian violence as a main driver of Sunni suicide attacks, we design a measure that indicates a presence of sectarian violence stemming from religious incongruence. In contrast, suicide attacks that occurred in the context of personal revenge, socioeconomic origins, or resistance to perceived outsider oppression are considered non-sectarian violence. The first independent variable, SECTARIAN VIOLENCE, is dichotomous, coded as “1” when the suicide bombing relates to religious war and “0” for non-religious war. The second hypothesis looks at the effect of a minority Islam sect, so we create the second independent variable, MUSLIM-TARGET, coded as “1” when the target is Muslim and non-Sunni. This simply marks whether the target of a suicide attack was identifiably Muslim and non-Sunni. Otherwise, it is coded as “0.”

We likewise test a variety of alternative explanatory variables, emphasizing targeting factors and attributes related to organizational sponsors of individual attacks. These include: FOREIGN-TARGET, which we record as “1” when an attack strikes a foreign target and 0 otherwise; “fowhen the target is civilian in nature—meaningreign” target, as opposed to a “domestic” target, depends on whether the target was attacked in the country of its nationality. CIVILIAN-TARGET, which we code as a “1” when the target is civilian in nature—meaning not part of a military, the police, intelligence apparatus, or a private security force, and 0 otherwise; MUSLIM-ORGANIZATION, which we record as “1” when the sponsoring militant organization subscribes to an ideology derived from political Islam and “0” otherwise;⁴⁹ FOREIGN-ORGANIZATION, which we code as a “1” when the sponsoring militant organization operates outside the attacker’s native country, and a 0 otherwise.

In an effort to avoid omitted variable bias, we also model four control variables commonly found in the literature on suicide attacks: foreign military occupation, militant outbidding, democracy, and economic development. Pape argues that terrorist organizations are most likely to launch suicide attacks when a foreign democracy controls their desired territory militarily.⁵⁰ We include a dummy variable coded as “1” for all observations where the target country is experiencing a FOREIGN MILITARY OCCUPATION. This variable comes from a category of –66 in the composite democracy score of Polity that documents cases of foreign “interruption.”⁵¹ Following Choi and Piazza,³ we also test an indicator of foreign military interventions, based on the International Military Intervention Data.⁵²

Outbidding theory suggests that competition among militant organizations for constituent support and notoriety drives “extreme tactics,”⁵³ and specifically the proliferation of suicide attacks.⁵⁴ Accordingly, we measure the potential effect by counting the total

NUMBER OF MILITANT ORGANIZATIONS representing a given identity group or political constituency. We base the data on our collection of militant organizations engaged in suicide attacks. As a robustness check, we also analyze a similar measure from Young and Dugan.⁵⁵

The terrorism and political violence literature offers competing evidence on whether democratic governance encourages suicide attacks⁵⁶ or terrorism in general for that matter.⁵⁷ We remain agnostic as to regime type's effect yet control for its potential impact. Collected from the Polity dataset, the DEMOCRACY variable ranges from -10 (least democratic) to $+10$ (most democratic).

When the national economy performs well, Sunni Muslims should hold fewer economic grievances and perhaps find the prospects of engaging in suicide attacks less attractive.⁵⁸ We control for this possibility by measuring the ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT variable as GDP per capita in constant 2005 dollars, as collected from the World Bank's *Economic Development Indicator 2017*.

Empirical findings

As the dependent variable is dichotomous, we employ logistic regression (logit) for estimation.⁵⁹ Table 1 displays the logit results, with Model 1 marking the base model. In Models 2 through 5, we add control variables one at a time to the base model. The estimated coefficients and standard errors in Model 1 provide supportive evidence for our

Table 1. Sunni suicide attacks and sectarian violence.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Sectarian Violence	4.361*** (0.200)	4.333*** (0.197)	4.351*** (0.294)	4.358*** (0.199)	4.384*** (0.204)
Target Characteristics					
Muslim	2.294*** (0.108)	2.161*** (0.112)	2.469*** (0.170)	2.255*** (0.132)	2.285*** (0.109)
Foreign	1.179*** (0.182)	0.998*** (0.198)	-0.156 (0.264)	1.157*** (0.181)	1.183*** (0.183)
Civilian	-0.301** (0.107)	-0.289** (0.108)	0.465** (0.150)	-0.299** (0.107)	-0.302** (0.107)
Organization Characteristics					
Muslim	2.888*** (0.128)	2.989*** (0.126)	4.169*** (0.324)	2.882*** (0.128)	2.855*** (0.128)
Foreign	0.267* (0.130)	0.190 (0.124)	1.396*** (0.233)	0.266* (0.130)	0.279* (0.129)
Foreign Occupation		0.445*** (0.126)			
Democracy			0.010 (0.022)		
Number of Militant Organizations				0.006 (0.010)	
Economic Development					-0.047 (0.036)
Constant	-6.138*** (0.223)	-6.262*** (0.223)	-8.039*** (0.440)	-6.170*** (0.223)	-6.089*** (0.226)
Wald Chi ²	1571.16	1600.97	532.18	1601.30	1561.41
Prob > Chi ²	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Log Pseudolikelihood	-1283.51	-1277.07	-643.05	-1283.33	-1282.18
Pseudo R ²	0.51	0.51	0.55	0.51	0.51
Observations	6,224	6,224	3,055	6,224	6,223

Note: Robust standard errors, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, two-tailed tests.

hypotheses.⁶⁰ Due to varying data availability of control variables, the total number of observations for Model 3 diminishes in comparison to the other models. Chiefly, the models support the sectarian violence hypothesis. The three target characteristics are significantly different from zero and the two organizational features render the same empirical support. Because the p -value for Wald χ^2 is less than 0.000, all five of the models are statistically significant—meaning that there is a significant effect of the independent variables, taken together, on the dependent variable. In addition, given that the pseudo R^2 ranges from 0.51 to 0.55, the models appear well-constructed to determine the driving factors of Sunni suicide attacks.

The SECTARIAN VIOLENCE variable in Model 1 is statistically significant at the 0.001 level and in the hypothesized direction. This means that sectarian violence likely drives Sunni suicide attacks. MUSLIM-TARGET and FOREIGN-TARGET achieve statistical significance with a positive sign. This means that Sunni Muslims are more willing to carry out a suicide bombing against minority Muslims with different religious beliefs, and Sunni suicide bombers are more likely to target at foreign targets rather than domestic ones. The coefficient on CIVILIAN-TARGET is significant and its sign is negative, suggesting that Sunni Muslims are less likely to target civilians. Both MUSLIM-ORGANIZATION and FOREIGN-ORGANIZATION are statistically significant. When belonging to a militant organization mobilized along ideological tenets derived from Islam, Sunni Muslims are more inclined to execute a suicide attack. And, when a sponsoring organization operates transnationally, Sunni Muslims are also more likely to carry out a suicide attack.

The significance of our main variables generally remains the same when we add other potential predictors of suicide attacks to the model specification. Model 2 controls for the effect of FOREIGN MILITARY OCCUPATION, where the variable demonstrates significance. Yet, the variable's effects are not powerful enough to diminish any effect of the main variables except for FOREIGN-ORGANIZATION.⁶¹ Model 3 tests the impact of democratic political systems. Aligning with previous findings,⁶² it appears that the quality of democratic governance has no bearing on Sunni suicide attacks. There is no evidence that democratic institutions provide disgruntled Sunni Muslims with a peaceful way of conflict resolution that reduces the risk of conflict that induces suicide attacks.⁶³ Model 4 includes the NUMBER OF MILITANT ORGANIZATIONS to test the outbidding theory that predicts a high volume of political violence when an organization tries to outbid rivals. It turns out that the NUMBER OF MILITANT ORGANIZATIONS variable is not associated with Sunni suicide attacks. Model 5 adds ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT as a control, in which it lacks statistical significance and does not make any of the primary predictors insignificant.⁶⁴

In Table 2, we combine our main variables with the alternative explanatory and control variables. Note that Figure 2 shows that Sunni suicide attacks spike around 2006–2007 at the height of sectarian conflict in Iraq; a second spike occurs in 2014–2015, which reflects increases in the Islamic State's attacks in Iraq and Syria. To account for the effect of suicide attacks occurring in these two countries, we include a dummy for IRAQ AND SYRIA. Again, because both FOREIGN MILITARY OCCUPATION and DEMOCRACY come from the same measure based on the Polity data collection, we cannot include both variables in the same model. All the missing observations (i.e., –66) in the composite democracy score in Polity represent the presence of foreign military occupation.⁶⁵ The

Table 2. Sunni suicide attacks and sectarian violence: Combined models.

Variable	Model 6	Model 7
Sectarian Violence	4.347*** (0.200)	4.366*** (0.304)
Target Characteristics		
Muslim	2.110*** (0.140)	2.240*** (0.181)
Foreign	0.975*** (0.195)	−0.073 (0.267)
Civilian	−0.287** (0.109)	0.529*** (0.150)
Organization Characteristics		
Muslim	2.999*** (0.158)	4.357*** (0.386)
Foreign	0.149 (0.167)	0.918*** (0.257)
Foreign Occupation	0.466*** (0.117)	
Democracy		0.033 (0.023)
Number of Militant Organizations	−0.001 (0.010)	0.007 (0.011)
Economic Development	−0.064 (0.035)	−0.037 (0.051)
Dummy for Iraq and Syria	0.106 (0.190)	2.822*** (0.649)
Constant	−6.221*** (0.228)	−8.376*** (0.488)
Wald Chi ²	1616.92	543.76
Prob > Chi ²	0.000	0.000
Log Pseudolikelihood	−1274.56	−626.98
Pseudo R ²	0.51	0.56
Observations	6,223	3,054

Note: Robust standard errors, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, two-tailed tests.

first combination in Model 6 shows no substantive changes in terms of significance levels, coefficient, and direction. All the variables exert a similar degree of causal effects, confirming the robustness of the findings reported in Table 1. The second combination of Model 7 likewise confirms the main findings of this study.

To visualize the estimated results, we plot average marginal/substantive effects in Figure 3 based on log odds of Model 6 in Table 2. Average marginal effects give us an effect on the probability, i.e., a number between 0 and 1. They represent the average change in probability when each independent variable increases by one unit. Since logit regression is non-linear in nature, the effect differs from case to case. Unsurprisingly, the average marginal/substantive effects are consistent with the significance tests, indicating that the marginal/substantive effect of SECTARIAN VIOLENCE is the largest. In other words, not only does sectarian violence matter, it inspires individual Sunni Muslims to carry out suicide attacks more than competing reasons.

Qualitative analysis of sectarian violence

The contemporary era demonstrates numerous examples of sectarian conflicts. The following analyses detail five ideal country cases that further complement the empirical findings: Lebanon (1975–1990), Iraq (2003–present), Syria (2011–present), Nigeria (2009–present), and Pakistan (2003–present). These case examples illustrate that sectarian conflict has always

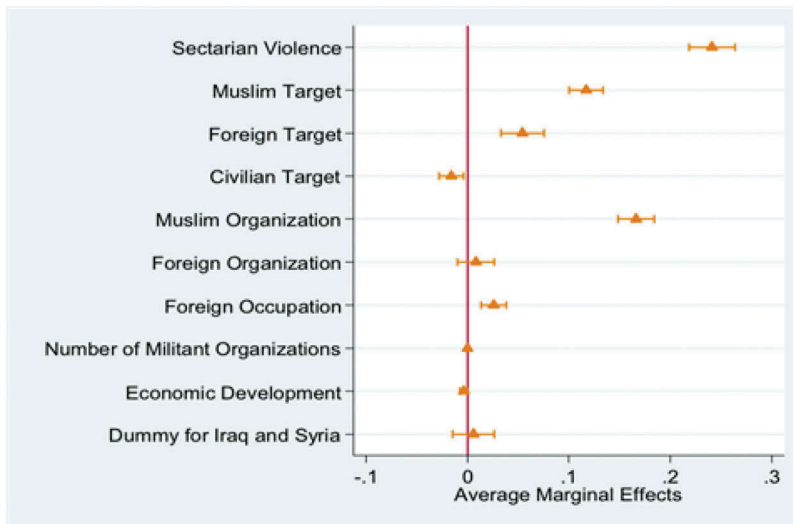


Figure 3. Average marginal effects.

played some role in the suicide-attack phenomenon going back to the early years (e.g., Lebanon), as well as now offering a primary explanation of the growing use of the tactic in intra-Muslim conflicts (e.g., Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Pakistan). Subsequent to presenting our five ideal case examples, we address the case of Afghanistan, which does not neatly fit the model.

Lebanon

Lebanon's civil war included a host of mini-conflicts between warring sects and factions within those sects. Hezbollah's suicide attacks against U.S., French, and Israeli troops commonly garner much attention in the literature on suicide attacks. Yet, during 1985 and 1986 (the peak years of suicide attacks in Lebanon), Muslim organizations predominantly targeted Lebanese Christian militias and civilians with the tactic.⁶⁶ In particular, the largely Christian South Lebanon Army (SLA) took the brunt of most suicide attacks in Lebanon. Additionally, in 1985, amid battles for sectarian control over parts of Beirut, predominantly Sunni-Muslim organizations such as al-Mourabitoun and the Palestinian National Salvation Front employed suicide attacks against the Shi'a militant organization Afwaj al-Muqawamma al-Lubnaniyye (Amal), as well as Shi'a brigades of the Lebanese army.⁶⁷ Notably, this supports the contention that suicide attacks generally derive from sectarian conflict. The belief that suicide attacks took place in Lebanon due to the military occupation of the country's southern region by the Israel Defense Forces fails to explain why suicide attacks stopped occurring in 1990 even though Israel's "occupation" continued until 2000.⁶⁸ Nor does it explain why suicide attacks did not begin when the Syrian military occupied most of the country in 1978. Our sectarian violence theory, however, can explain why the cessation of suicide attacks in Lebanon aligned with the conclusion of hostilities in 1990 between militant Shi'a organizations (like Hezbollah and Amal) and militant Christian organizations (like Kata'eb, Lebanese Forces, the SLA, and the

Guardians of the Cedars),⁶⁹ and between Sunni Palestinian organizations and the militant Shi'a organizations.

Iraq

The seemingly daily suicide attacks in Iraq over the last 15 years regularly involve foreign and domestic militant Sunnis—often affiliated with the Islamic State (IS)—attacking Shi'a targets.⁷⁰ Many of these attacks strike both security forces and civilian targets. Why? Under Saddam Hussein's Ba'athi regime, the minority Sunni sect in Iraq enjoyed extensive political benefits. Yet, the 2003 invasion of Iraq altered the political life of Sunni Muslims, who have since generally found themselves devoid of national-level power. The Shi'a majority that endured suppression by the Ba'athi regime for decades has since established political power and extended preferential status to its own sectarian identity group.⁷¹ These sectarian tensions brought militant Sunni organizations, such as Al Qaeda in Iraq and Ansar al-Sunnah and later IS, to view suicide attacks as an effective tactic to disseminate their political message.⁷² Amid the Iraq war, violence between the two Muslim rival sects has led to tens of thousands of deaths across Iraq, as well as the destruction of countless homes, communities, and mosques.⁷³ Compounding the effects of Iraq's sectarian conflict, the U.S. withdrawal in 2011 created a power vacuum, which generated even more suicide attacks.⁷⁴

Syria

The sectarian dynamic of Iraq holds in Syria where individual suicide bombers associated with IS, *Jabhat Fatah ash-Sham* (Front for the Conquest of the Levant), and others attack troops loyal to the Alawi-Shi'a Assad regime. Going back to Hafez al-Assad's massacre of thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members and supporters in Hama, Syria in 1982, Sunnis have long sought retribution against Syria's ruling Alawis.⁷⁵ Militant Sunnis also commonly use suicide attacks in their war against Kurdish nationalist militias, such as Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG or People's Protection Units). The Syrian conflict, which has resulted in nearly half a million deaths,⁷⁶ has almost entirely taken on a sectarian tone, with even regional actors lining up in support of sectarian kin. Indeed, the conflict represents the greater Sunni-Shi'a violence that has only spread and increased in intensity since the 1979 Shi'a revolution in Iran and the subsequent Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988)—the bloodiest war since WWII. Syria now represents the country with the fifth most suicide attacks in the modus operandi's history following Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Nigeria.⁷⁷

Nigeria

With even more than Syria, Nigeria marks the country with the fourth most suicide attacks ever.⁷⁸ In Nigeria, the fundamentalist Sunni organization *al-Wilayat al-Islamiyyah Gharb Afriqiyyah* (West Africa Province of the Islamic State)—often referred to as Boko Haram—regularly dispatches suicide bombers to attack “apostate” Muslims and “infidel” non-Muslims. The conflict has left over 32,000 people dead⁷⁹ and displaced millions,⁸⁰ many of whom have fled zones plagued by suicide attacks.

Common targets include marketplaces and Mosques condemned by Boko Haram. While many frame Nigeria's conflict as Muslim *versus* Christian, Boko Haram considers Shi'a, Sufi, and Izala Muslims apostates⁸¹ and since 2012 has accordingly targeted them with suicide attacks. After the execution of Boko Haram's founder Muhammad Yusuf in 2009, Abubakar Shekau assumed leadership over the organization and began reshaping Boko Haram to his ideological preferences. Centrally, the organization altered its central command infrastructure to an Islamic *majlis al-shura* (Islamic consultative council) and collectively adopted suicide attacks in 2011.⁸² Beginning in 2012, with its suicide attack on the central mosque in Maidguri that killed five people and nearly missed assassinating Borno's *Shehu* (a regional Islamic leader) Abubakar Umar Garbai El-Kanemi while he was attending Friday prayers, Boko Haram has focused many assaults on "apostate" Muslim communities.⁸³ On July 23, 2014, Boko Haram assassinated a rival Islamic cleric along with two dozen others in his entourage. Less than a week later, two female suicide bombers killed 24 worshippers at two separate mosques in Potiskum. On November 3, 2014, a Boko Haram suicide bomber struck an Ashura procession (a key practice of remembrance in Shi'a Islam), killing 32 and wounding 119. A couple weeks later, two Boko Haram bombers attacked a mosque in Kano, killing 120 people and wounding 270. In 2015, Shekau pledged a *baya'ah* (oath of allegiance) to IS-leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, bringing Boko Haram into the IS alliance, and officially reorienting the organization to "cleansing" the territory it governed from apostasy. High-casualty suicide attacks continued in 2015 and 2016, with Boko Haram's most deadly attacks striking Muslim areas or explicitly Muslim sites. Boko Haram's desire to cleanse its desired territory from apostate and infidel sectarian rivals continues to drive its attack targeting and use of suicide bombers. However, Boko Haram's shift in 2012 speaks to the notion that it has predominantly shifted away from targeting the "infidel" state forces to focusing on wiping out "apostate" Muslims.

Pakistan

As early as 1995, Pakistan has experienced suicide attacks—many of which involved a Sunni-Shi'a dynamic.⁸⁴ Pakistan is a diverse country of over 200 million people with a wide variety of ethno-sectarian identity groups. Various ethnic groups call Pakistan home: Punjabis, Muhajirs, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Baloch, Saraikis, and others. While a Pashtun insurgency against coalition and government forces in Afghanistan and the largely Punjabi-dominated Pakistani government consumes much of the scholarly analysis of terrorism emanating from Pakistan, sectarian conflict accounts for the majority of suicide attacks inside Pakistan. Notably, Sunni jihadi organizations like Tehrik-e Taliban, Lashkar-e Jhangvi (LeJ), Jaish-e Muhammad (JeM), and others commonly conduct suicide attacks against Pakistani Shi'a. Sunni terrorists have increasingly preferred to use suicide bombers in targeting Shi'a, as well as Sufi, civilians.⁸⁵ In particular, LeJ's *raison d'être* throughout its lifespan has remained the eradication of minority Muslim sects, such as Hazara Shi'a, inside Pakistan as well as Afghanistan. On July 4, 2003, LeJ targeted a Shi'a mosque, killing 53 people. On February 28, 2004, in Rawalpindi, JeM, a different Sunni organization, similarly targeted a Shi'a mosque, followed by another LeJ attack on May 7, 2004 that targeted a Shi'a mosque in

Karachi and killed 23 people. The last 15 years has seen the trend continue and again gives credence to the theory that Sunni organizations with abstract outcome goals find it more useful to eliminate “apostates” than try to coerce “infidels.”

Does Afghanistan fit the model?

A number of examples do not fit the model, but regarding the countries that have experienced the most suicide attacks, Afghanistan marks an outlier. In Afghanistan, while the Sunni Taliban and its allies have carried out numerous suicide attacks against Shi’a in the country, most suicide attacks target fellow Sunnis allied with the government or coalition forces. Perhaps the chief reason has been the Taliban’s ability to seriously challenge Afghanistan’s government forces. This capacity has likely offset the Taliban and other Sunni militants from turning inward to weaker “apostate” Muslim civilians as is the case in other conflicts.

Conclusion

Over the last decade, a rich body of literature has analyzed the suicide-attack phenomenon from a variety of perspectives. We investigate the effects of sectarian violence on the phenomenon, offering a first-cut empirical investigation along with five case examples. Our research along with a wider literature of suicide attacks that contends that a Muslim “civil war” remains responsible for a majority of the suicide-attack phenomenon.⁸⁶ Advancing the research paradigm, we zero in on sectarian violence and specifically such conflicts involving fundamentalist Sunni Muslims.

Our large- n empirical analyses and model-testing case examples show that sectarian violence marks a central facet in the phenomenon, especially as it concerns the use of suicide attacks by Sunni Muslims. Indeed, as compared to non-sectarian suicide attacks, the Sunni targeting of minority sects within Islam is on the rise and represents an increasing majority of suicide attacks during the past four decades. The finding on sectarian versus non-sectarian suicide attacks might indicate the arrival of another new form or wave of terrorism—*intra-Muslim struggle*. In addition, on average, suicide attacks kill significantly more people than other tactics of political violence,⁸⁷ and therefore eliminating their use and proliferation should sit near the top of policymakers’ agendas. Notably, without reducing sectarian conflict, the terrorism-prone countries of the Islamic world will likely be unable to escape an emerging epidemic of the ever-devastating and lethal suicide attack.

The heightened risk of sectarian violence may justify the prescription of dividing a conflict-ridden country along sectarian lines. Empirical work consistently reveals that ethnic, sectarian, and religious diversity in conjunction with political exclusion tends to spawn violent conflict.⁸⁸ As Kaufman warned nearly 20 years ago: “We should not fail to separate populations in cases that have already produced large-scale violence and intense security dilemmas, even if in some such cases we might later wish that we had acted sooner and in yet other cases we may not be able to decide whether to act.”⁸⁹ In this regard, policymakers should make separation, irredentism, or other forms of self-determination a priority over preserving the integrity of conflict-ridden heterogeneous states.

Separation may prove essential in dealing with the current greatest perpetrators of suicide attacks: the Islamic State, Jabhat Fatah ash-Sham, and Boko Haram. Movement away from the preservation of the existing demographics and borders of Iraq, Syria, and Nigeria, respectively, could greatly diminish the likelihood of continuing sectarian violence that generates mass suicide attacks. Indeed, had the U.S. only divided Iraq into three along ethno-sectarian lines, it could have assuaged many of the motivating factors spurring internal violent conflict.⁹⁰ In any event, policymakers need to recognize the role sectarian violence, and especially such conflicts involving militant Sunni Muslims, plays in perpetuating suicide attacks.

For future research, we acknowledge that our analysis may extend to non-suicide terrorism. Due to data collection projects that are focused on suicide terrorism, the study of terrorism might slowly be reaching a point where terrorism is conflated with suicide terrorism. But, there is a large number of killing of civilians by terrorists, including Sunni-Sunni attacks, that do not take the form of suicide bombings (e.g., most Palestinian deaths result from the Fatah-Hamas rivalry).⁹¹ Why should the motivation there be any different? In other words, why would a Sunni terrorist who does target Sunnis forego a suicide attack and choose some other method? Probing this question would require another new data collection effort and different statistical methods, so we leave it for future research.

Notes on Contributors

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Notes

1. In this study, we refer to a “suicide attack” as an act of political violence that initiates with the attempted—and usually successful—suicide of its perpetrator against a civilian, military, or political target.
2. Shirzad Bozorgmehr and Angela Dewan, “Iran Attacks,” *CNN*, June 7, 2017; Molly Hennessy-Fiske and Ramin Mostaghim, “Thousands Attend Funeral for Victims of Tehran Terror Attacks,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 9, 2017.

3. Seung-Whan Choi and James Piazza, "Foreign Military Interventions and Suicide Attacks," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61 (2017): 271–97; and Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).
4. Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72 (1993): 22–49.
5. As exceptions, Acosta attributes much of the continued rise in suicide attacks to "internal conflict in the Islamic world." Benjamin Acosta, "Dying for Survival: Why Militant Organizations Continue to Conduct Suicide Attacks," *Journal of Peace Research* 53 (2016): 182; and Hafez's case study on suicide attacks in Iraq similarly focuses on the "Muslim civil war" dynamic. Mohammed Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq* (Washington, DC: United States [U.S.] Institute for Peace Press, 2007).
6. John Hall, "Sunni and Shi'a Muslims," *Independent*, January 4, 2016.
7. David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Los Angeles: University of California, 2005).
8. The Caliphate refers to the transnational Islamic empire that governs the *um'mah* (Islamic nation).
9. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq* (see note 5), 129.
10. William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015).
11. Throughout this study, we use the term *Sunni suicide attacks* to signify a political tactic of fundamentalist Sunni Muslims who purport to spread their own version of pan-Islamism across the globe.
12. Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2005); Mohammed Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs: The Making of Palestinian Suicide Bombers* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute for Peace Press, 2006); and Stathis Kalyvas and Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, "Killing without Dying," in *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*, edited by Diego Gambetta (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 209–32.
13. Observing that most suicide bombers subscribe to a variant of political Islam, many researchers conclude that jihadi ideology and the Islamic concept of self-sacrificial martyrdom drive the suicide-attack phenomenon. See Rafael Israeli, *Islamikaze* (London: Frank Cass, 2003); Ivan Strenski, "Sacrifice, Gift and the Social Logic of Muslim 'Human Bombers,'" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15 (2003): 1–34; Shaul Shay, *The Shahids* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2004); Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, translated by David Macey (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005); Scott Atran, "The Moral Logic and Growth of Suicide Terrorism," *The Washington Quarterly* 29 (2006): 127–47; Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq* (see note 5); Mohammed Hafez, "Dying to be Martyrs," in *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism*, edited by Ami Pedahzur (New York: Routledge, 2007), 54–80; Jonathan Fine, "Contrasting Secular and Religious Terrorism," *Middle East Quarterly* 15 (2008): 59–69. With large-*n* empirical analyses, several empirical researchers confirm the connection—demonstrating a significant and positive relationship between political Islam and suicide attacks. See Sara Jackson Wade and Dan Reiter, "Does Democracy Matter?," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51 (2007): 329–48; Benjamin Acosta and Steven Childs, "Illuminating the Global Suicide-Attack Network," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36 (2013): 49–76; Simon Collard-Wexler, Costantino Pischedda, and Michael Smith, "Do Foreign Occupations Cause Suicide Attacks?," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58 (2014): 625–57; and Robert Braun and Michael Genkin, "Cultural Resonance and the Diffusion of Suicide Bombings: The Role of Collectivism," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58 (2013): 1258–84.
14. Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom* (see note 13), 2.
15. The term *Salafi* refers to Sunni Muslims who "reject the division of religion and state" as did Muhammad and his *sahaba* (companions). Contemporary *Salafi-jihadis* seek to reunify Islam and the state through violent holy war. Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom* (see note 13), 45; see also Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq* (see note 5), 64–70.
16. "Outcome goals" refer to the chief political ends that organizations pursue. See Max Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work," *International Security* 31 (2006): 42–78; Max Abrahms,

- "The Political Effectiveness of Terrorism Revisited," *Comparative Political Studies* 45 (2012): 366–93; Benjamin Acosta, "Live to Win Another Day: Why Many Militant Organizations Survive Yet Few Succeed," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37 (2014): 135–61; and Acosta, "Dying for Survival" (see note 5), 183.
17. James Piazza, "A Supply-Side View of Suicide Terrorism," *Journal of Politics* 70 (2008): 28–39. Other works similarly connect "apocalyptic" outcome goals with the organizational use of suicide attacks. See Diego Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); David Cook and Olivia Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks: The Faith and Politics of Martyrdom Operations* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007); and Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, revised and expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).
 18. Abrahms, "The Political Effectiveness of Terrorism Revisited" (see note 16).
 19. Acosta, "Live to Win Another Day" (see note 16), 147–56.
 20. David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks* (see note 17); Hafez, "Dying to be Martyrs" (see note 13).
 21. Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks* (see note 17); Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom* (see note 13).
 22. See *The Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, translated by Muhammad Taqi-ud Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Medina, Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an); and Ram Swarup, *Understanding the Hadith: The Sacred Traditions of Islam* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2002). See also Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2005).
 23. Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (see note 7).
 24. This is not to suggest that those states have not fended off numerous Islamic foes. Israel and India have fought a variety of conflicts against Muslim states and terrorist organizations. Russia has fought in Chechnya for decades, and Sunni jihadis have attacked Spain or plotted attacks against the country various times in recent years.
 25. See Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (see note 20); Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks* (see note 17); and Benjamin Acosta, "Palestinian Precedents," in *Political Islam from Muhammad to Ahmadinejad*, edited by Joseph Skelly (Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2010), 193–204.
 26. Benjamin Acosta, "The Suicide Bomber as Sunni-Shi'i Hybrid," *Middle East Quarterly* 17 (2010): 13–20.
 27. See Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers* (see note 13); Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (see note 20); and Acosta, "The Suicide Bomber as Sunni-Shi'i Hybrid" (see note 26), 14–15.
 28. Nizari-Isma'ilis did not assume the name Assassins, but rather referred to their sect as *ad-Da'awa* (The Calling). See Benjamin Acosta, "Assassins," in *Cultural Sociology of the Middle East, Asia & Africa: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Andrea L. Stanton (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), 21–22.
 29. Acosta notes: "Hussein and his followers did not choose martyrdom at the Battle of Karbala in the manner of most other Islamic martyrs in successive generations. Nevertheless, Shi'i tradition embellishes his death with prophetic foreknowledge of the outcome." Acosta, "The Suicide Bomber as Sunni-Shi'i Hybrid" (see note 26), 14.
 30. Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers* (see note 13).
 31. Christoph Reuter, *My Life Is a Weapon*, translated by Helena Ragg-Kirkby (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Acosta and Childs (see note 13), 54–55.
 32. Acosta, "Palestinian Precedents" (see note 25), 194.
 33. Acosta, "Palestinian Precedents" (see note 25), 194–95. See also Hafez, "Dying to Be Martyrs" (see note 13), 76, note 2 and 77 notes 4–5; and Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq* (see note 5), 168, 185 note 7.
 34. Acosta, "Palestinian Precedents" (see note 25), 198. See also Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq* (see note 5), 7–8.
 35. Acosta and Childs (see note 13), 54.

36. In the late 1980s, Hezbollah's spiritual advisor, Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, issued a fatwa (Islamic religious decree) authorizing martyrdom operations "only on special occasions" in order to prevent "exaggerated use [by] overzealous youth." Rafael Israeli, "A Manual of Islamic Fundamentalist Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 14 (2002): 30. This led to a drastic decrease in Shi'a martyrdom operations to the point that Hezbollah did not carry out suicide attacks in the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel War nor has it done so in the Syrian War.
37. We define *terrorism* as the use of violence by a non-state actor against non-combatants for the purpose of political gain. See Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (see note 17).
38. Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks* (see note 17).
39. Hafez, "Dying to be Martyrs" (see note 13).
40. Acosta, "Palestinian Precedents" (see note 25), 194–95; Adam Lankford, *The Myth of Martyrdom* (New York: Palgrave, 2013).
41. Strenski, "Sacrifice, Gift and the Social Logic of Muslim 'Human Bombers'" (see note 13); Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers* (see note 13); S. Brock Blomberg, Gregory D. Hess, and Yaron Raviv, "Where Have All the Heroes Gone? A Rational Choice Perspective on Heroism," *Public Choice* 141 (2009): 509–22; as Rapoport observes: "Terrorist martyrs always generate recruits, revitalize morale, and usually create favorable sentiments among potential supporters." David Rapoport, "Preface," in *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism*, edited by Ami Pedahzur (New York: Routledge, 2007), xvii.
42. Al-Qaradawi cited in Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (see note 17), 160. In 2001, amid the Palestinian *al-Aqsa intifada*, al-Qaradawi declared jihad an individual obligation of all Muslims. See Hafez, "Dying to be Martyrs" (see note 13), 77 note 4.
43. Bruce Hoffman and Gordon McCormick, "Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 27 (2004): 243–81; Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs* (see note 12).
44. See Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
45. Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom* (see note 13), 45.
46. See Anat Berko and Edna Erez, "'Ordinary People' and 'Death Work,'" *Violence and Victims* 20 (2005): 603–23; Anat Berko, *Path to Paradise* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007); Cook and Allison, *Understanding and Addressing Suicide Attacks* (see note 17); and Hafez, "Dying to be Martyrs" (see note 13).
47. SAND contains far more cases than those found in other publically available datasets of suicide attacks, such as CPOST ($n = 4,993$ for the years 1982–2015) and Santifort-Jordan & Sandler's compilation dataset ($n = 2,448$ for the years 1998–2010). See Charlinda Santifort-Jordan and Todd Sandler, "An Empirical Study of Suicide Terrorism," *Southern Economic Journal* 80 (2014): 981–1001. For a further explanation of SAND, see Acosta, "Dying for Survival" (see note 5), 181–82.
48. Certainly, militant organizations provide suicide attackers with logistic supplies. However, it is ultimately a decision of each bomber to carry out a suicide attack, justifying the use of individual incidences rather than organizations. Note also that recent advances in methodology indicate that dyadic design is unfit for the modeling task at hand. See Skyler Cranmer and Bruce Desmarais, "A Critique of Dyadic Design," *International Studies Quarterly* 60 (2016): 355–62.
49. This is inferred from the doctrines and/or manifestos of organizations.
50. Pape, *Dying to Win* (see note 3). For important critiques of Pape's thesis, see Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (see note 12); Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work" (see note 16); Wade and Reiter, "Does Democracy Matter?" (see note 13); Scott Ashworth, Joshua Clinton, Adam Meiorowitz, and Kristopher Ramsay, "Design, Inference, and the Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Science Review* 102 (2008): 269–73; Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom* (see note 13); Acosta and Childs (see note 13), 50–52 and 69–70; and Acosta, "Dying for Survival" (see note 5), 181–82.
51. Monty Marshall, Ted Gurr, and Keith Jagers, *Polity IV* (2016); accessible at www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html.

52. Emizet Kisangani and Jeffrey Pickering. "Codebook." ICPSR, 2008, www.k-state.edu/polsci/intervention (accessed March 1, 2017). Because the estimated effect was similar to that of foreign occupation but the former changed the data ending point from 2016 to 2005, our base analysis draws on the latter.
53. Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics* 13 (1981): 379–99.
54. Bloom, *Dying to Kill* (see note 44); Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security* 31 (2006): 49–80.
55. Because Young and Dugan's measure does not alter our main findings, we omit its estimates to save space. Joseph Young and Laura Dugan, "Survival of the Fittest," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8 (2014): 2–23.
56. Pape, *Dying to Win* (see note 3); Piazza, "A Supply-Side View of Suicide Terrorism" (see note 17); Wade and Reiter, "Does Democracy Matter?" (see note 13).
57. Max Abrahms, "Why Democracies Make Superior Counterterrorists," *Security Studies* 16 (2007): 223–53; Acosta, "Live to Win Another Day" (see note 16); and Deniz Aksoy and David Carter, "Electoral Institutions and the Emergence of Terrorist Groups," *British Journal of Political Science* 44 (2014): 181–204.
58. Seung-Whan Choi, "Economic Growth and Terrorism," *Oxford Economic Papers* 67 (2015): 157–81.
59. To assuage a possibility of some kinds of model misspecification, we estimate models with robust standard errors.
60. We conduct multiple rigorous diagnostic tests: variance inflation factors (VIFs), R^2 , eigenvalues, and condition index. None of the statistics show severe multicollinearity among the predictors.
61. This finding aligns with the results of two studies that suggest a deeper variable related to Islam drives much of the suicide-attack phenomenon. See Acosta and Childs (see note 13), 66–71; and Collard-Wexler, Pischedda, and Smith, "Do Foreign Occupations Cause Suicide Attacks?" (see note 13).
62. Wade and Reiter, "Does Democracy Matter?" (see note 13); and Piazza, "A Supply-Side View of Suicide Terrorism" (see note 17).
63. Nevertheless, because the DEMOCRACY and FOREIGN MILITARY OCCUPATION variables both derive from the Polity measure, we are unable to test the possibility that an interaction between DEMOCRACY and FOREIGN MILITARY OCCUPATION decreases the likelihood of Sunni suicide attacks. It remains plausible that the establishment of a democratic government, protected by a strong foreign military presence like the U.S., would bring stability and human development to conflict areas in the Islamic world in the same way the U.S. stabilized German and Japanese human development in the decades after World War II (WWII).
64. This finding aligns with Atran's theoretical assertions. See Scott Atran, "Genesis of Suicide Terrorism," *Science* 299 (2003): 1534–39.
65. To avoid the missing data problem, we used Kisangani and Pickering's foreign intervention variable that turned out to be a significant predictor, while the democracy variable was not. See Kisangani and Pickering, "Codebook" (see note 52). This alternative modeling strategy led to virtually the same result as reported in Table 2 where the two variables are tested separately.
66. See the Suicide-Attack Network Dataset.
67. Acosta, "Dying for Survival" (see note 5), 180–81.
68. Certainly, the Jewish-Muslim conflict dynamic contributed to Hezbollah's use of suicide attacks, but it accounts for far less of the phenomenon in Lebanon than commonly assumed.
69. See Edgar O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon, 1975–1992* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); and William Harris, *The New Face of Lebanon: History's Revenge* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2006).
70. The sectarian use of suicide attacks in Iraq has not been limited to IS. Its predecessor organizations, affiliates, and some Sunni allies and competitors have likewise employed suicide bombers against sectarian rivals. These include IS predecessors (al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, Tanzim Qaedat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafideyn, Majlis Shura al-Mujahedin fil-'Iraq, Dawlat al-'Iraq al-

Islamiyya, ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyya fil-‘Iraq wash-Sham), and affiliates (Ansar al-Islam, Ansar al-Sunnah, Jund al-Sahaba), among others.

71. See Fouad Ajami, *The Foreigner's Gift* (New York: Free Press, 2007).
72. See McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse* (see note 10); Nir Rosen, *In the Belly of the Green Bird* (New York: Free Press, 2006); and Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq* (see note 5), 70–83.
73. Jonathan Finer and Bassam Sebt, “Sectarian Violence Kills Over 100 in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, February 24, 2006.
74. Scott Field, “Will Iraq Fall Apart?,” *Al-Jazeera*, May 11, 2014.
75. Nir Rosen, “A Tale of Two Villages,” *Al-Jazeera*, October 24, 2011.
76. Simon Lewis, “The Death Toll from Syria’s War Is Actually 470,000, New Research Claims,” *Time*, February 11, 2016.
77. See the Suicide-Attack Network Dataset.
78. See the Suicide-Attack Network Dataset. Also see the dataset for details of all attacks in Nigeria subsequently noted.
79. “Boko Haram,” *Al-Jazeera*, December 26, 2016.
80. Michelle Nichols, “U.N. Appeals for Help for Boko Haram Displaced,” *Reuters*, September 25, 2015.
81. Tolu Ogunlesi, “Nigeria’s Internal Struggles,” *New York Times*, March 23, 2015.
82. Alain Vicky, “Aux origines de la secte Boko Haram [in French],” *Le Monde diplomatique*, April 2012, www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2012/04/VICKY/47604.
83. Ibrahim Mshelizza, “Suicide Bomber Kills 5 at Northeast Nigerian Mosque,” *Reuters*, July 13, 2012.
84. See the Suicide-Attack Network Dataset for details of all attacks in Pakistan subsequently noted.
85. See Human Rights Watch, “‘We Are the Walking Dead’: Killings of Shia Hazara in Balochistan, Pakistan,” June 29, 2014, www.hrw.org/report/2014/06/29/we-are-walking-dead/killings-shia-hazara-balochistan-pakistan.
86. Acosta, “Dying for Survival” (see note 5), 182 and 194.
87. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (see note 17).
88. See Lars-Erik Cederman, Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min, “Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel?,” *World Politics* 62 (2010): 87–119; Julian Wucherpfennig, Nils Metternich, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, “Ethnicity, the State, and the Duration of Civil War,” *World Politics* 64 (2012): 79–115; and Benjamin Acosta, “From the Barrel of a Gun” (paper presented at the International Studies Association Annual Convention, New Orleans, Louisiana, 2015).
89. Chaim D. Kaufman, “When All Else Fails,” *International Security* 23 (1998): 155.
90. James Baker and Lee Hamilton, *The Iraq Study Group Report* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).
91. See Jonathan Schanzer, *Hamas vs. Fatah: The Struggle for Palestine* (New York: Palgrave, 2008).